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Bulwer-Lytton's place in the English drama of the middle Nineteenth Century.

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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

BULWER-LYTTON'S PLACE IN THE ENGLISH DRAMA
OF THE MIDDLE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

Martha Kennerly Gibson

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**BULWER-LYTTON'S PLACE IN THE ENGLISH DRAMA
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INTRODUCTION

**THE PROBLEM; BACKGROUND FOR, AND ANALYSIS OF,
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INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM; BACKGROUND FOR, AND ANALYSIS OF, BULWER-LYTTON'S DRAMA

The purpose of this thesis is to show Bulwer-Lytton's contribution to the English drama of the middle Nineteenth Century. I became interested in this subject through a study of Nineteenth Century literature. Though numerous poets and novelists of this period have won lasting recognition, the dramatists have been obscure. Thus, I determined to find out why most English students are familiar with Dickens, Thackeray, Browning, Wordsworth, and Shelley, but why each one asks, "Was there any well-known dramatist in the first half of the Nineteenth Century?"

First, I found that this subject has been discussed very little; histories of the drama have passed quickly over the period between Sheridan and Robertson. The only book which I found purporting to analyze thoroughly this dramatic period was E. B. Watson's From Sheridan to Robertson, and even it dealt chiefly with conditions of the stage rather than with the plays themselves. It reveals the deplorable situation of the early Nineteenth Century theatre, the handicaps with which playwrights had to contend, such as the ignorance of theatre-goers, and the utter lack of interest of the literati in the stage. Finding, upon further investigation, that the actor-manager of Drury Lane and later of Haymarket Theatre,

William Macready, struggled alone to "elevate the stage," I read Macready's diary and, in it, learned of Bulwer-Lytton's dramatic career, how he began under the guiding aegis of Macready, how he struggled for recognition and how he established himself as the leading dramatist of his day. From Allardyce Nicoll's A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama I discovered the need of a thesis on Bulwer-Lytton. The fact that very little had been done on the subject was in itself a challenge; it was a worthwhile study since it would furnish information on an otherwise obscure period in English dramatic writing and would show the transition between Sheridan and Robertson; and, furthermore, it would tell why only Bulwer-Lytton's dramas have survived this period.

The materials for this study consist mainly of articles in literary periodicals from 1831 through 1931, criticisms by Bulwer's contemporaries, comments written immediately following his death, and remarks upon subsequent revivals of his plays. I have compiled my material from an exhaustive study of all articles relating to Bulwer-Lytton found in journals listed in Poole's Index to Periodicals, with special emphasis on documents published before 1850, Reader's Guide to Periodicals, and from some bibliographical material found in the publications of the Modern Language Association. I have also investigated cross references to other articles found in the journals. I have used the official Knebworth edition of

Bulwer-Lytton's plays, published by his son in 1882. For background and source of the plays, I have relied chiefly on Macready's diary,¹ since it gives firsthand information about Bulwer-Lytton's dramatic writings and their public reception, and on the historical surveys by Watson² and Nicoll,³ since I have found that these furnished the best and the only really complete picture of conditions in the theatre during Bulwer's time. For biographical material, I have relied mainly on Sadleir's Bulwer, A Panorama,⁴ Bell's Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer⁵ and on Bulwer's only authorized biography, that written by his son and published in 1883.⁶

My thesis divides naturally into two parts, the background for and the analysis of Bulwer-Lytton's contribution to English drama. The background needs two chapters; to give, first, a survey of the Nineteenth Century drama and to point out the conditions of the theatre at Bulwer-Lytton's time, and, secondly, to give the facts about Bulwer-Lytton's life and career in relation to the theatre and drama.

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1. William Macready, Reminiscences, Diaries, and Letters, edited by F. Pollack, London, 1875.
 2. E. B. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, A Study of the Nineteenth Century London Stage, Harvard University Press, 1926.
 3. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 1800-1850, 2 vols., Cambridge University Press, 1930.
 4. Michael Sadleir, Bulwer, A Panorama, London: Little, Brown, and Co., 1931.
 5. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer, Chicago: W. M. Hill, 1914.
 6. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton, London, 1883.

In the first chapter of the second part, I shall analyze Bulwer's first plays, written under Macready's supervision for the professional theatre; in the second chapter, the plays written for amateur theatricals and charitable purposes, as well as his "closet drama," none of which won either financial success or literary fame for their author. I shall study his plays from the standpoint of source material, plot, dialogue, characterization, and mechanical structure. I shall endeavor, both from my own analysis and from contemporary criticism, to show why some of his dramas failed and others succeeded, how Bulwer-Lytton dramatized ideas that had occurred in fiction, how his plays were indicative of public taste and how representative of his age, and why many lines from his dramas have been quoted out of their context. I shall, moreover, endeavor to show the part Bulwer-Lytton's drama plays in the transition from the sophisticated comedy of Sheridan to the beginnings of realism in Robertson, and to summarize the essential characteristics of Bulwer's plays, indicating in what respects he is like and in what respects unlike the other dramatists of his time. I shall try to point out why his Money, Richelieu, and The Lady of Lyons, although written during this decadent period in English drama, yet have held the stage for fifty years, have constantly been revived, and have served as starring vehicles for a consecutive line of outstanding performers. Moreover, I shall

endeavor to show how and why Bulwer-Lytton has a distinctive place in the English drama of the middle Nineteenth Century, why he is representative of his period, and why some of his dramas alone have survived.

CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF ENGLISH DRAMA 1800-1850

CHAPTER I
A SURVEY OF ENGLISH DRAMA
1800-1850

Although at the opening of the Nineteenth Century the English stage could occasionally produce a sophisticated comedy or a picturesque melodrama which has survived, middle Nineteenth Century drama with few exceptions, is little known today. There was indeed prolific writing for the stage during the middle Nineteenth Century; but playwrights, who were then popular, are now almost obscure. I shall endeavor, in this chapter, to discuss the multitudinous factors contributing to this condition of English drama: the popularity of the novel overshadowing the drama, the rigid censorship of the theatre and the strict moral code of the Victorians hampering free expression, the public's demand for melodrama crowding out other types of plays, the unreality of the stage producing dramas with unfamiliar situations, the monopoly conditions restricting managers in their choice of plays, the excessively long runs of popular pieces discouraging new talent, the actor-manager system inhibiting originality, and the varied and dissimilar classes of theatregoers forcing dramatists to write plays equally appealing to them all.

One reason for the decadence of the drama was the popularity of the novel among both avid and discriminating readers; the best literary talent was spent upon the novel rather than

upon the drama. Even Bulwer-Lytton, one of the most popular dramatists, first achieved success with his novels.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century such alliance as there was between the English theatre and English letters was spasmodic, uneasy, unprofitable. Neither, it seemed, had much to bring the other . . . again the main fault may have been in the national disposition of the time towards a certain moral contentment, new found creature comforts, and the fireside. Great drama, with its emotional stirrings, and the irony of comedy are the enemies to content; and it is not the theatre's business to be at odds with its public, as its public will soon make plain.¹

The author of an article, "The Victorian Stage," attributes the decline of the drama to an increased interest in reading:

When books are the luxury of a few, the stage is the resort of the many. As a taste for reading is diffused, and the means of gratifying it extended, the hold which the drama once possessed on the popular mind is naturally weakened. It is only to be expected, therefore, that with the decline of its importance, there should be some diminution of its excellence; so that both the highly educated and the cultured classes, as well as those below them, no longer find what they want in it, so fully as they did of old.²

Thus, there is, on the one hand, the novel, discussed appreciatively by the critics and read eagerly by the literary public; while, on the other hand, completely divorced from serious consideration by men of letters, we have the outcast drama. Frank Marshall wrote, in 1878, of the difficulties of dramatic writing,

1. H. G. Barker, "Some Victorians Afield," Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. 13; April-May, 1929.

2. "The Victorian Stage," The Living Age, Vol. 228; Mar. 16, 1901.

The difficulties which beset the path of the dramatist nowadays, who would give us original plays of real literary merit, are almost insuperable, and it is small wonder if very few writers are found even to attempt to overcome them.¹

Also, the regulation that plays could not be printed or published simultaneously with their production, except at the risk of losing the right of presentation, prevented the dramatist from appealing to the reading public as well as to the sober judgments of his audience. For, previously, a considerable portion of the author's profit had arisen from the sale of the play when printed.

The clash between the theatre and public morals was another reason for the mediocrity of the plays; better known authors were reluctant to write for a stage which was certainly not consistent with the standards of Victorian morals. For, in the early Nineteenth Century, the theatre was no place for a man to take his daughters. So great was the need of censorship to check the increasing tendency of dramatists to appeal to the lower instincts of the crowd that a censor was appointed in 1820.

. . . a University scholar of eminence who had devoted many years to the study of theatrical literature, and was able to comprehend the scope and province of the theatre. He confined his supervision almost entirely to matters affecting questions of propriety, and being entirely above all suspicion of political influence or pecuniary interest, it was very seldom that one of his opinions was disputed. In fact, so little was heard of him that comparatively few

1. Frank Marshall, "The Drama of the Day in Its Relation to Literature," The Theatre, Aug. 1, 1878.

persons were aware of his existence or of the authority which he exercised.¹

Jacob Isaacs, in an article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, also comments thus on dramatic censorship:

. . . the drama between 1844 and 1862 was still governed by a state censor; for which office the Lord Chamberlain was responsible, and by local licensing authorities who could restrict productions either on account of unsuitable matter such as might give moral offense or be a likely cause of riots and unrest.²

Larpent and Coleman, censors until 1836, were officious rather than official in their duties and so foolishly expurgated many plays. Moreover, there was a conflict between the strict prurience of the licensers and the practices in the playhouses themselves. Since theatre managers had to fight, with one attraction after another, dullness and insipidity, vulgar sentiment and hypocritical morals, fashionable fancy, petty and insincere tastes, truly it is a wonder that even a Bulwer-Lytton could write for such patrons and yet produce anything of merit.

Critical scholars of this period agree that the early mid-Victorian stage did not hold a mirror to reality. Not only was the playgoer's motive seldom literary, but it was not even regarded as the function of dramatic art to hold a mirror up to human nature, to current manners, or to problems of the hour or of eternity. This truly was the key reason

1. "The Theatre and Public Morals," *The Nation*, Vol. 68; Feb. 9, 1899.

2. Jacob Isaacs, "Nineteenth Century Drama," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th edition, Vol. 7.

for the failure of most Nineteenth Century drama to survive;
for

. . . to the student who wishes to map out the social landscape of the time the stage offers extremely little evidence. In no sense were the actors the abstracts of their time. Unfortunately, the English stage was so far divorced from the national culture that it failed totally to interpret in terms of drama the immensely important and immensely exciting developments in the knowledge, wealth, and power of mankind. If ever history was throwing material to the playwright, it was then; but the playwright was too busy with importing French trivialities or concocting the routine of the farces to pay any attention to his superb opportunities of doing for the theatre what Dickens and Thackeray were doing for the novel.¹

In a discussion of "The Victorian Stage" in The Living Age, one finds these further comments upon the unreality of the stage:

It may be doubted whether the dramatists of that day aimed at producing anything like real life, like what they themselves saw either in private life or at their clubs and taverns. Now there was a reason at that time why this did not affect their general popularity. During the twenty years between 1830 and 1850 the stage was gradually losing its hold upon the fashionable world; and the majority of playgoers neither knew nor cared whether the scenes set before them professing to represent that world were true or not. It was sufficient that they were thoroughly amusing. They paid for a good laugh and they got their money's worth.²

Theatre patrons and producers insisted upon incidents and actions being unduly exaggerated; "an exact and unembellished copy of what we really see would be insipid or unintelligent" was an expressed opinion of one unknown theatregoer. Thus, as the gap between life on the stage and life off it became wider

1. Loc. cit.

2. "The Victorian Stage," The Living Age, Vol. 228; Mar. 16, 1901.

and more apparent, English drama began to decline, since discriminating drama-lovers no longer gave playwrights their support.

Webster's offer of £500 in 1843 for the "best comedy of high life" shows that he, at least, felt the want of something different from the very popular London Assurance, a silly, extravagant farce which came out in 1841.

A writer of the time has said that the frivolity of the drama seemed an indispensable relief from the seriousness of life. Thus, one might infer that the drama of this period was not only an escape from the drabness of Victorian living, but also an amusing portrayal of scenes which theatre patrons liked to make believe were real; for no genuine comedy or tragedy could rise out of the level grayness of early Victorian society.

Likewise almost nothing of the nation's political life is traceable in the drama. Watson accounts for it thus:

The theatre existed solely by the grace of the king and his chamberlain; nothing but the most slavish deference was tolerated on the stage. A perfunctory yearly visit by royalty to each major theatre, and a few historical and regal pageants, given especially on the occasion of coronation, were about the only interchange of courtesy, except, of course, the ostentatious singing of the national hymn by the entire company, which was a feature of each performance, and which now survives in the single musical phrase played hurriedly at the fall of the curtain in all London theatres. Until the reign of Victoria, royalty took little or no notice of the drama, and at no time was the stage allowed to mirror the actions of the government. Bulwer-Lytton, in the preface of the 1841 edition of his plays, pitied himself because he had to conduct a play through the period following the French revolution without

being political or talking of starting a republic.¹

Everywhere . . . in burlesque, in comedy, and in farce, there prevailed the same spirit of exaggeration and whimsicality that sought to amuse more by its extravagance than by its interesting representation of real men and real events. In Bulwer's Money (and other comedies) there was a suggestion of the advance made in the actor's art during the previous decades; but such work looked backward rather than forward for its inspiration, and its realistic novelty was merely a compromise with tradition.²

The types of stages and scenery also greatly limited the playwright in the scope and structure of his drama. The introduction of gas lights toward the end of the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century further enhanced the desire for the spectacular on the stage. In the plays, Richelieu and The Duchess de La Valliere, Bulwer employed many scenes of pageantry and of elaborate stage effects, which were very effective upon the "apron stage" used at that time, as well as the dramatic monologue which brought the actor to the front of the "apron stage." The effect of these stage conditions upon the drama is described by Matthews and Lieder:

Since the performer was surrounded on three sides by the audience, this helped to increase the tendency toward eloquence, loud sounding rhetoric, and sheer bombast - a tendency which had been inherited from the Elizabethans. As most of the later theatres were large, and as the stage was spacious, there came in time to be an elaboration of spectacular effect and of scenic device. Scenery was more or less appropriate and changes of place could be swiftly indicated by the sliding across of the flats which met in the center. The action was no longer on a neutral ground - it was localized by the scenery; and the scenery could be changed as many times as need be in the course of a single act.³

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, chapter on "London Life and Stage," Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.
2. Ibid., chapter on "Acting in Burlesque."
3. Matthews and Lieder, The Chief British Dramatists, chapter on "The Theatre in England."

Another important factor influencing the drama of this time was the struggle over theatre monopolies. Theatre monopolies are best explained thus: from 1800 to 1843, by virtue of the patent rights, Drury Lane and Covent Garden (and Haymarket during the summer months) enjoyed the exclusive privilege of presenting "legitimate" or "regular" drama. Legitimate drama was defined, in 1832, as a play in which the interest of the piece is mental rather than physical. Macready also defined the term as applying to "a play of poetic quality or superior literary worth." Such plays were required to have five acts, and these, together with the "after piece" and often a "curtain raiser," made the evening's performance so very long that suggestions were made for a shortened matinee. Playwriting was prolific, at this time, because of the keen competition for public support between the major theatres, presenting serious drama, and the minor, or burlesque, theatres. "Their professional activity, indeed, was such as well might make even the most prolific of our modern dramatists bow their heads in admiration."¹ Many plays were produced, unlicensed, before the Examiner had even returned the manuscript.

E. B. Watson's book, From Sheridan to Robertson, devotes a whole chapter to this struggle between the major and the minor theatres, between the "legitimate" and the "burletta."

1. Allardyce Nicoll, "Twenty Three Thousand," Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. 13; April, 1929.

Every effort was made by those who had the interests of the drama at heart to put an end to the monopoly. Even the unfortunate and downtrodden writers for the stage came forward in the agitation that Arnold's petition to the king [in December, 1831] had stirred up.¹

The same group that had petitioned the king met again on February 24, 1832, with Bulwer presiding, and made a petition to Parliament. This action was based chiefly on two pamphlets to Thackeray, which had been widely circulated that year.

The upshot of all this movement was Bulwer-Lytton's Dramatic Performance Bill which, in turn, followed upon the work of the Select Committee of Parliament, whose report was presented Aug. 2, 1832. This bill made it clear that the only hope for improved dramatic conditions lay in the freeing of the theatre from the exacting restrictions put upon them, and in a reasonable and consistent method of licensing theatrical performances.²

The Bill passed the House of Commons but was defeated by the House of Lords. No manager from 1826 to the freeing of the theatres (Aug. 22, 1843) made the monopoly theatres pay; and what money was gained seemed to have come rather from the circus part of the program than from the legitimate drama. Even Macready's best efforts failed, and in relinquishing his management in 1843, he declared that the drama under monopoly conditions could not succeed. For, by the obligations which the monopoly forced upon them, the managers were forced, however wretchedly, to present a kind of drama for which the theatres were not in the least adapted. It was only after the abolition of the monopoly of the two patent theatres,

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, Chapter 2, "Theatrical Monopoly."

2. Loc. cit.

Drury Lane and Covent Garden, near the end of the first half of the century, that smaller theatres came into existence, diminishing the demand for eloquence, and giving a greater sense of intimacy.

Since there were many minor theatres which were obliged, under the monopoly conditions, to present "illegitimate" or "irregular" drama, there can be no doubt that by far the most common types of minor pieces were burlesques, extravaganzas, revues, fairy plays, melodramas without literary pretensions, vaudeville, farces, and comediettas, few of which have survived their own period. This situation was another reason for the lack of interest of the literati in the drama. A critic of the time made this caustic comment upon the alleged decadence of the English drama:

This was an era of decadence for the English drama, when even its privileged theatres could not live on their privilege; but in self-preservation were compelled to adopt the shameful policy of their competitors, which were everywhere springing up around them. Thus Shakespeare gave way to jugglers and mountebanks, to Chinese giants, and Indian dancing girls - while foremost of all attractions was a legless acrobat, suspended from a thread, who with outstretched wings sprang, like a monstrous fly, from floor to ceiling. Scenes from Shakespeare were, indeed, introduced as curtain-raisers or after-pieces, but in such mangled and distorted fashion as to be almost unrecognizable, and with such garniture of coarse and vulgar "mise en scene" as would never have been tolerated in the Elizabethan age.¹

One of the greatest influences upon the drama of this, as in all periods, was the type of theatre patronage; and in order

1. Alfred Bates, Drama, The Victorian Edition of, Vol. 16, 1903.

to understand why the dramatists were not writing noteworthy plays, we must first see what classes of people were theatre patrons. An article, "The Victorian Stage," gives us this picture of dramatic patronage:

Mrs. Gore won the prize with a comedy, Quid Pro Quo, but it did not bring back the world of fashion to the stalls and boxes. She herself says, "Were the boxes often filled with those aristocratic and literary classes of the community who have absolutely withdrawn their patronage from the English stage, a new order of dramatic authors would be encouraged to write, and of performers to study. But no one familiar with the nightly aspect of our theatres will deny that they are supported by a class requiring a very different species of entertainment - a mere daguerrotype picture of the manners of the day would afford little satisfaction to playgoers accustomed to the disproportion and caricature established with the custom of the stage."¹

Furthermore, a play in the Nineteenth Century had to be successful immediately; because of the many expenses for spectacular effects and the comparatively low admission fee, a play must catch the crowd on its first week, or the manager could not afford to keep it on his bills. It would be withdrawn with the stigma of failure, as was the fate of Bulwer's first play, The Duchess de La Valliere. The following statement from the "Dramatic Authors' Society," formed in 1830 by Bulwer-Lytton and other playwrights, indicates even more difficulties of the dramatists of this time.

Startling as it may seem, conditions prevailed in London during most of our period similar to those which prevented Shakespeare from publishing his plays. There was no such thing as acting rights. The only hold an author had on

1. "The Victorian Stage," The Living Age, Vol. 228; Mar. 16, 1901.

his property was in the original bargain with the manager who purchased the manuscript. Generally, this agreement specified, besides the purchase price, a bonus after a stated number of performances; but this was rarely large, and extended, as a rule, no further than the ninth performance. In any event, it was highly desirable for an author's play to be staged at once, but there was no guaranty to this effect.¹

H. A. Jones, a leading dramatic critic of the later Nineteenth Century, has this to say concerning the hard conditions of a play's immediate acceptance or repudiation by the multitude:

One may get some notion of what a blighting effect this must have had upon our drama by imagining the present condition of English literature if no works had survived except those stamped by the immediate acceptance of the mob.²

And how has this verdict of the mob affected the state of English drama? Melodramas which have contained the most prodigious excitement, the most appalling catastrophes, the most harrowing situations have been the most successful, and all this without much reference to probability of story or character. The more a play resembled a medley of those incidents and accidents which collect a crowd in the streets, the more successful it was. For, that the success of a piece was usually out of all proportion to its merit has been the verdict of subsequent dramatic critics. Dutton Cook, in his caustic article, "The Right to Hiss," has made these pertinent comments on the power of theatre audiences:

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, Appendix II, "Authors' Financial Difficulties."

2. H. A. Jones, "Theatres in England and the Public," Nineteenth Century Magazine, Vol. 14; p. 441, Sept. 1883.

Critics had grown so riotously vivacious, that no more mercy was shown to an unsuccessful author than to a notorious cheat in a pillory. According to Colley Cibber, they come now to a new play like hounds to a carcass, and all are in full cry sometimes for an hour together, before the curtain rises, to throw it among them. Cibber recommended that the hard condition of those who write for the stage should be considered; the warning to untried genius was, he thought, too terrible; a latent author might be tempted to the production of a play and should be sure that, if not approved, his manuscript might, at any rate, be dismissed with decency. Plays subjected to such treatment, the quieter portion of the audience terrified, and the skill of the actors quite disconcerted, seemed rather to fall by assassins than by a lawful sentence.¹

Yet, the introduction of the stalls, added to the severer moral tone of a later Victorian epoch, combined to help reform the general character of the playhouse. For the presence of fashionable and respectable women in the front of the old pit helped to subdue the more clamorous occupants of that region.

The early Nineteenth Century was almost as full of various "Systems" as modern society is of "isms"; mainly, the system of actor-managers, the "star" system, and the system of the repetition of popular plays, or the "long run." Each of these systems became involved with the other systems, and the unfortunate actor was the victim of them all.

Writers of the early Nineteenth Century differ markedly as to the advantages or disadvantages of these various systems to the stage in general and to the playwrights in particular.²

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1. Dutton Cook, "The Right to Hiss," The Theatre, p. 178, Oct. 1, 1883.
 2. Herbert B. Tree, "The Actor Manager," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 54; pp. 1-19.
Oswald Crawford, "Correspondence," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 54; p. 315.

Macready (actor-manager from approximately 1830 till his retirement in 1851), was the foremost protagonist of the actor-manager system.

When Macready began his Covent Garden career in 1837, the literati rallied about him, giving their encouragement and proudly courting his favor. Prominent among them were Dickens, Browning, Bulwer-Lytton, and Jerrold. Access to his green room became a highly coveted honor, even among the great. . . . Old playgoers, devotees, and members of the profession did all in their power to make a success of this last stand of the legitimate drama. Yet, the literary results were disappointing. Besides the most promising success of Bulwer's Lady of Lyons and Richelieu, and a few poor plays by Knowles, nothing of note was accomplished.¹

Macready's diaries are instructive reading; in them one may readily find many of the obstacles in the path of an aspiring dramatist. Shakespeare was Macready's standby, but he received new authors gladly, and wrestled with them for their success in the untried world of the theatre. An author need not have a reputation to obtain favorable reception from this actor-manager; he saluted Browning as a poet of great account upon his first reading of Paracelsus; and he recognized Bulwer's penchant for historical drama upon first reading his unknown and unpublished play, Cromwell. Yet, Macready's theatre was a poor school for nascent drama, too set in its methods, uninspiring, with the actor and his egoisms in full possession.²

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, chapter on "Pioneers of Reform in Management, Macready."

2. Frank Marshall, "The Drama of the Day in Its Relation to Literature," The Theatre, August 1, 1878.

The "star system" caused as many irritations for the aspiring dramatist as did the actor-manager system, for audiences came to see and hear the star rather than the new play; hence, the stellar role had to be grossly magnified. This is especially noted in the predominance of the Cardinal's part in Bulwer's Richelieu, and of Claude Melnotte's role in The Lady of Lyons. One dramatic critic has thus written about the character of Richelieu:

Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton gives us a Richelieu who is warm-hearted, unselfish, with the love of country paramount over all. By turns, the old man is grand, nay terrible, then full of sly humor with a keen appreciation of a joke. If the real Richelieu differs from the stage Richelieu, the author has only taken a poet's license. Richelieu may or may not have been the man we see set before us; no matter, we have a character that is strongly dramatic, full of great opportunities for the actor, especially so if he be a comedian as well as a tragedian. There are also the ever shifting changes from feebleness of age to indomitable will and power; the pride and pomp of state, the downfall and the restoration. What a world of wealth is all this, to lie within the actor's grasp!

This comment explains the great popularity of Richelieu as a stellar vehicle, from the days of William Macready to Walter Hampden.

Some writers derived incalculable benefit from the suggestions and help of the actors and did not hesitate to say so, as when Bulwer-Lytton generously acknowledged the great services rendered him by Macready.

There can be no doubt that Bulwer-Lytton worked "oen amore" with Macready, and that the play was submitted to the actor

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, chapter on "Pioneers of Reform in Management, Macready."

as it grew. Such collaboration is in the best interest of the stage and should be more frequently in use.¹

The many melodramatic effects in Richelieu, notably the "coup-de-theatre" in the sudden appearance of the Cardinal after his reported death, all tended to keep the audience sitting hushed, with bated breath, until the last words were spoken. Without Macready's practical knowledge of how to hold a theatre audience, Bulwer-Lytton might not have built up the climax with such consummate skill. Indeed, had there been more collaboration between experienced actor and literary dramatist, perhaps more plays of this period would have survived. For, with the exceptions of The Duchess de La Valliere (Bulwer's first play, produced before he acquired the knack of stage technique) and The Sea Captain (disapproved by Macready, and later produced under another title), Bulwer's plays which were produced by Macready, i. e. Richelieu, Money, and The Lady of Lyons, were his only financial and literary successes.

This collaboration was not always such a success, however, for one dramatic critic says of Bulwer's The Lady of Lyons:

With recent revivals, it has become the custom to omit the first scene; yet, that is a mistake, for it's the keynote to the play. The only reason for this mutilation of the play is that the star actress playing Pauline [Helen Faucit in the original] prefers the more effective entrance in the second act.²

1. Loc. cit.

2. Walter Gordon, "Popular Plays," The Theatre, Nov. 1, 1881.

The "star system," furthermore, greatly influenced the playwright's style, because he had to build up one part at the expense of the other. Minor parts, usually poorly played, would often ruin a play. Up to Macready's time, there were only line rehearsals, with no feeling put into the lines at rehearsal. The plays, accordingly, suffered from this slovenliness; Macready, on the other hand, insisted that his performers do more than say lines at rehearsals.

This "actor-manager-star system" of William Macready launched Bulwer-Lytton as a dramatist; for, as Watson explains,

Without apparently detecting the framework, the sentimentality, and the domesticity of melodrama in the works of Knowles, Bulwer-Lytton, and Byron, Macready pinned his faith to such authors because they were poetical and because their plays afforded him his greatest triumph.¹

Macready himself considered Richelieu as his second "in order of excellence" of all his tragic and melodramatic roles. The only real handicap to Macready's managerial policy was the fact that it was always determined by the fear of a rival actor.

At a period of the drama's greatest shame and distress Macready had raised the stage out of the mire, and he had given to it a prosperity - although not satisfying - that was greater, perhaps, than any it had enjoyed since the days of Garrick. He had drawn to it the interest and support of serious workers in the realms of art and letters, and of the more worthy representatives of the state and society. In his Covent Garden speech, he made the modest boast of "a season unequalled by any not having the attraction of a new performer for the last sixteen years." He could have boasted that he had taken the first step toward

1. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, chapter on "Macready."

restoring the dramatic art of England from its lowest decline to a place of respect and popularity among thoughtful men.¹

Another system ruinous to nascent playwrights was the "long run" of popular plays, Shakespearean revivals, and the "re-hashing" of French drama. A contemporary critic wrote, about the latter:

Nothing can better illustrate the estimation in which dramatic authors are now held than the fact that any one who tinkers up a translation of a French play, condensing and cutting so effectually as to destroy the development and harmony of the original . . . is ranked by the cultivated playgoer as highly as the man who designs his own plot, draws his own characters, and depends on his own brains for the dialogue.²

So much has already been said about public taste in the drama of the middle Nineteenth Century that only a few further remarks will be made here concerning which plays were popular with the theatre-going public. Those which were most successful were: Black-Eyed Susan and The Rent Day by Douglas Jerrold, Virginus and The Love Chase by J. S. Knowles, London Assurance and The Prima Donna by Dion Boucicault, The Ticket of Leave Man and Our American Cousins by Tom Taylor, A Tale of Mystery (from Pixerecourt) by T. Holcroft, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon by Robert Browning, and Bulwer-Lytton's A Lady of Lyons, Richelieu, and Money. Bulwer-Lytton's three dramas, moreover, attained such a peak of popularity that one commentator has said, "When the playgoer concerns himself about stage literature, he puts

1. Loc. cit.

2. Frank Marshall, "The Drama of the Day in Its Relation to Literature," The Theatre, Aug. 1, 1878.

Shakespeare and Bulwer-Lytton, Goethe and Knowles into tolerable niches in his curious stucco Pantheon of the Legitimate."¹ The drama of 1800-1850 also included the dramatizations of popular novels, notably those of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and Bulwer-Lytton.

The indifference of the literary critics to the drama, as being inferior in literary quality to the novel, caused the dramatists to bestow less time and less care upon works which, at best, were accorded such scant notice as The Lady of Lyons received in the Times:

The whole criticism did not occupy more than a third of a column. It runs thus: "The play kept up an interest which prevented tedium . . . We perceive the form is superior to the construction, the characters are the over-drawn characters of melodrama. Claude, who, in a fit of ill-humor, is persuaded to be an impostor, yet turns out to be a prodigy of valor . . . There are Republican clap-traps. Surely if hereditary dignity is to be attacked, the stage of Covent Garden need not be the platform whence such sentiments are uttered . . ." Thus, it will be seen that the leading journal made a dead set against the sentiment of the play.²

Another reason for the failure of middle Nineteenth Century drama to survive was the fact that dramatists consciously addressed their readers instead of their hearers. H. A. Beers thus comments,

In the Nineteenth Century, English poets who adopted the dramatic framework did not write for the theatre. They did not expect their pieces to be played, and they addressed themselves consciously to the reader. When one of them had the luck to get upon the boards it was an exception, and the

1. H. B. Tree, "The Actor Manager," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 54; July, 1890.

2. Walter Gordon, "The Lady of Lyons," The Theatre, Nov. 1, 1881.

manager generally lost money by it. Thus, in the late thirties and early forties, in one of those efforts to elevate the stage, Macready rallied the literati to his aid and presented, among other pieces, Bulwer's Richelieu and The Lady of Lyons. The only titles on the list that secured a permanent foothold on the repertoire of the playhouses were Bulwer's two pieces, which were precisely the most flimsy, from a literary point of view.¹

To summarize, so many factors kept the stage in its unreal and backward state during the middle Nineteenth Century that one marvels how any dramatist of worth could have survived. Theatre patronage was both varied and variable; no longer were audiences merely Londoners with the pit as a god. Plays which had to interest a noisy gallery as well as to appeal to the educated playgoers, who, though infrequent in attendance, were extremely critical, were very difficult to write for the meager remuneration received. Then, too, few literary men cared to brand their professional reputation with the stigma of a failure merely because their plays had failed to win the instantaneous approval of the masses. The best literary talent was then writing for the novel, which was not as rigidly censored as the drama. There was general dissatisfaction with the stage because of its unreality; yet, only melodramas could win much financial or popular success, and even the melodramas were hampered by the various "systems" of actor-managers, excessively long runs of popular pieces, exaggeration of the stellar role, and the stage limitations

1. H. A. Beers, "Retrospects of the Drama," The North American Review, Vol. 185; pp. 623-634.

imposed by the monopoly conditions.

From this morass of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, out of this "dark age" of the theatre, one playwright did emerge whose Richelieu is as intriguing a role for Walter Hampden today as it once was for William Macready. For Edward Bulwer-Lytton took up a literary challenge that Macready offered and wrote dramas which attempted to improve stage conditions. Some of these plays have survived to show to subsequent generations many of the faults and much of the best in the Nineteenth Century drama.

CHAPTER II

BULWER-LYTTON'S LIFE IN RELATION
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Behind the drama is the man himself; hence, behind the plays of Bulwer-Lytton is the fascinating drama of this playwright himself, a drama unrivalled by any of his own works. "An Ibsen husband married to a Strindberg wife," is the way in which The London Nation¹ conceives the ill-starred union of Lord and Lady Lytton, that unhappy marriage which virtually forced him into literature.

In this chapter I shall endeavor to explain, first, why and how Bulwer-Lytton became a literary man; second, why and how he became a dramatist; and third, how he achieved his dramatic success in spite of numerous obstacles.

Edward George Earle Bulwer, son of General Earle Bulwer and Lady Elizabeth Lytton, was born in London, May 25, 1803, and studied at Cambridge, where he won the Chancellor's medal in 1825, a gold medal given for an English prize poem. That early victory gave him more pleasure than any literary success in later life. Fraser's Magazine, however, ridiculed both the verse and the author, an early act of hostility which Bulwer felt was prophetic of the reception of all his work by the periodical press. This fact accounts, in part, for his con-

1. Edward J. Wheeler, "Bulwer-Lytton as an Illustration of the Tragedy of the Literary Temperament," Current Opinion, Vol. 56, Jan. - June, 1914.

tinuous antagonism toward the critics. In his autobiography, written in a mature style when the author was only twenty-two, he attempts to vindicate his first works, which had been violently criticized, and also to justify his popularity, which had already by 1825 become manifest. The Bookman says of this time in his life,

The story of the first twenty-two years of Bulwer-Lytton's life, as told by himself, makes entertaining reading and throws a vivid light on the England of his time . . . the sprightly autobiography stopped at the point where the tragedy [his unhappy marriage] began.¹

There was an unusually close bond between Edward and his mother; he was her favorite son and she encouraged his early literary efforts in every possible way. Determined that he should have every opportunity to develop his talents, she made him a liberal allowance, permitted him extensive travel on the Continent in the "gentlemanly style" which was then the fashion, and encouraged his habits of voracious reading. This latter fact subsequently served him well in the historical background necessary for some of his plays. Piqued that the entailed Bulwer inheritance should go to the elder son at her husband's death, Mrs. Bulwer got court permission to use her maiden name of Lady Lytton, to restore the Lytton estates, and to endow her favorite son with much of her own patrimony. In 1844, Edward also inherited his mother's estate of Knebworth

1. "Bulwer-Lytton's Story," a review of his biography written by his grandson, the Earl of Lytton, 2 vols., Macmillan, 1914.

and assumed the surname of Lytton; in 1866, he was raised to the peerage as Lord Lytton. This explains the anomaly of his dual name.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine echoes the consensus of critical opinion in this statement about Bulwer's education and its effect upon his literary efforts:

A true child of his age, he was fantastic, sentimental, and fashionably morbid. From the first, he believed himself endowed with special gifts and marked out for a special destiny. His education, narrow and self-conscious, had almost wholly eradicated from his nature the valuable quality of humor. He was what today we should call a prig; he was prepared to view his slightest action with a profound seriousness; and he posed before the world as a lettered exquisite and the near rival of Benjamin Disraeli.¹

Since his first writing was solely for literary recognition and to display a "gentlemanly hobby," Bulwer delighted in showing his literary versatility by alternating classical quotations with thieves' slang, enjoyed contrasting his curled and perfumed exquisites with such unsavory characters as Job Johnson and Brimstone Bess.

His first love affair, ethereal in its youthful tenderness and soon ended by her forced marriage,² was translated into the ethereal unworldliness of Louise's love for King Louis in Bulwer's first play, The Duchess de La Valliere.

Bulwer's meeting with Rosina Wheeler and their subsequent marriage changed his whole life and was responsible for his

1. "Bulwer-Lytton, the Man and His Work," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 173, May, 1903.

2. "Bulwer-Lytton's Story," a review, The Bookman, Vol. 38, Jan. 1914, pp. 470-474.

beginning a serious literary career, since his mother, in anger at his wedding, stopped his allowance. An observer who watched the lovers, in April, 1828, noted in Bulwer-Lytton "that aristocratic something bordering on hauteur" which reminded the onlooker of the passage, "Stand back, I am holier than thou." The same observer, dazzled by the loveliness of Miss Wheeler, judged that it would be best "to regard her as we do some beautiful, caged, wild creature of the woods - at a safe and secure distance." It was not strange, perhaps, but unfortunate, that Bulwer-Lytton failed to notice the lack of moral delicacy in the beautiful creature who lured him. But his mother was under no delusion regarding Rosina and declared firmly that her son should never marry "a penniless girl whose education had been so flagrantly neglected, who was vain and flighty, with a mocking and a conspicuous lack of principle."¹

Yet, marry they did; the result was tragedy. The London Nation said,

He married her in the end from a sense of duty because he had, in the deepest measure, compromised her. Cast off by a disapproving and angry mother, he had to work to make ends meet in a highly expensive home, a matter of £ 3,000 a year. His incessant work in literature and journalism meant that he had little time to spare for his wife . . . quarrels followed, and scenes before servants, and reconciliations, till the breaking point was reached and husband and wife lived apart - the wife comforting herself with drink and revenging herself by accusing him of all manner of wickedness on obscene postcards; the husband trying to

1. Loc. cit.

have her shut up in a lunatic asylum.¹

Even the circumstances of their marriage were strange; after Bulwer had quickly become betrothed to Rosina, the engagement was broken because of his mother's opposition. Rosina "pined away" and, making him think she was ill, asked him to come for a last good-bye. Reluctantly, he did so. According to the strict Victorian standards, during this short interview he had compromised her, because they were unchaperoned and also publicly engaged; and so, he felt duty-bound to marry her. His mother blamed Rosina; and he himself was torn between his duty to and his love for his mother and Rosina.² Bulwer, later, translated this conflict of filial versus romantic love into his plays, as love against honor, and as parent against sweetheart. His mother, deeply angry that her favorite son had married against her wishes, immediately stopped his allowance; and the young author, who had written for pleasure, was now forced to write for bread.

Bulwer's marriage and its tragic results were predominant in the career of the man and poisoned it deeply to the latest hour of his consciousness . . . his love and his [subsequent] hatred alike spurred him to action.³

And action there had to be; for at the age of twenty-five, he began his professional career which was to end in drudgery.

1. Edward J. Wheeler, "Bulwer-Lytton as an Illustration of the Tragedy of the Literary Temperament," Current Opinion, Vol. 56, Jan. - June, 1914.
2. Edmund Gosse, "Life of Bulwer-Lytton," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 100, Dec. 1913.
3. Loc. cit.

He was now to write, not for fame, or for pleasure (as when under his mother's gentle influence), but for bread. And in the acceptance of his obligation, all his mental gifts and force of character were subjected to the severest regimen by his practical judgment. He knew well that, if his pen were to support him, it must be both popular and prolific. He resolutely resisted the allurements of those departments of literature which most attracted him. In literature's lowest and obscurest regions, he toiled unremittingly. The single object for which he now wrote was to pay his way through the world from year's end to year's end, owing no man anything. And what unknown, unrecorded drudgery to compass this one poor desperate end!¹

His son also comments on Bulwer's industriousness, "The fortune on which my father married had no other sources than his well-stored portfolio, his teeming brain, and his indefatigable industry."²

Rosina herself managed the household so extravagantly that Bulwer would have been deeply involved in debt had he not taken matters into his own hands, for he did have a "remarkable faculty of making money go far and getting the most out of it"; indeed, he was able to "live well on little means without shabbiness or debt."³ For, one commonplace virtue was indeed his; he was exceptionally industrious.

The demon of work pursued him from his cradle to his grave; the mere speed at which he produced his stories, his plays, and his pamphlets should convince us that when once he had set himself down to his desk, he lost all account of time. To Richelieu and The Lady of Lyons, his greatest dramatic successes, he devoted a fortnight

1. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Loc. cit.

apiece. The fact that he was such a prodigiously prolific writer explains why he is now read with less appreciation than he once was . . . That which is written with so sublime an ease proves, in the long run, the most difficult of reading.¹

Bulwer-Lytton, immediately and without apparently the slightest difficulty, developed a literary industry the sober record of which approaches the fabulous. Walter Scott alone may be held to have equalled it. The giants of popular fiction did, indeed, enjoy larger single successes than Bulwer-Lytton did, but none of them, not Dickens himself, was so uniformly successful. Everything he wrote sold as though it were bread displayed to a hungry crowd.²

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine offers this explanation of his immediate popularity;

He met with an immediate success, for he was able to give the people precisely what they wanted without effort, and he was precisely the sort of man which the people, in 1828, were inclined to worship. He was well-born; and he had already created about himself an air of indolent feppery; wherefore, he made an instant appeal to a democracy which, already conscious of coming reform, still condescended to be amused by the gentry. And if the people understood him, he understood the people. He followed the shifting taste as a doctor follows the changing temperature of a fever patient.³

Although it was his personal obligations, caused by his unwise marriage, which drove him to write for a living, yet the vicissitudes of his private life did not interfere with his work. For his son says, "Throughout a life more ravaged than that of most men by domestic griefs and violent emotions, he retained a singular power of concentrating all his faculties

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1. "Bulwer-Lytton, the Man and His Work," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 173, May, 1903.
 2. Edmund Gosse, "Life of Bulwer-Lytton," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 100, Dec. 1913.
 3. "Bulwer-Lytton, the Man and His Work," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 173, May, 1903.

on the intellectual task of the moment."¹

Three people, unwittingly, were responsible for Bulwer's literary career; his mother encouraged his early and precocious talent for writing, his wife forced him to write for a living, and Macready persuaded him to write for the stage. Since I shall, in the next chapter, discuss the influence of his real life situations upon his writing, I shall now state merely that Bulwer employed his imaginative talent in developing dramatic plots and vivid characterizations which might offer him an escape from his own unhappy reality. Often he buried himself in his work to forget the ceaseless torments of his domestic life. His son remarks, ". . . their author had himself passed through the trials and surmounted the difficulties of situations similar to those he describes."²

So much has been written of Bulwer-Lytton's brief though brilliant political career that here it will be mentioned only in its influence upon his writing. His resourceful eloquence, developed through his political addresses, is

1. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

2. Ibid. (On his death, Bulwer-Lytton left all his papers to his son with instructions that no one else was to write his life. As soon as his public work allowed, the son carried this out as a sacred duty. He published a part of it in 1883, but his death in 1891 left it unfinished. Hence, the grandson also felt it his sacred duty to complete a full biography. He built his biography upon the unfinished one of his father containing Bulwer's papers and letters, as well as upon Bulwer's autobiography. These two biographies, therefore, contain the only complete and reliable account of Bulwer's life.)

constantly being employed in his dramas to feature the star actor. The fact that "he acted in sympathy with every popular aspiration for the political, social, and intellectual improvement of the whole national life"¹ may have been responsible for his collaboration with Macready in writing plays to "elevate the stage." Furthermore, because "he was an ardent reformer wherever he recognized a rational promise of practical improvement,"² he championed the cause of persecuted dramatists by helping the "Authors' Act of 1833" to be passed.³ Another significant fact is that Bulwer's most brilliant political career was from 1831 to 1841, while his three most successful plays were written in 1838, 1839, and 1840. Because of domestic difficulties which affected his public life, Bulwer quit politics in 1841 but entered it again in 1852. Yet, during this later period in politics, as well as in his dramatic writing, he seemed content to rest upon his laurels; hence his accomplishments were mediocre. One may conclude, therefore, that his political career helped him in his dramatic writing, and that his fight with his political opponents gave him the courage necessary to battle with hostile theatre audiences. Furthermore, he directly used his political influence for the alleviation of dramatic

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1. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, "Sketch of the Political Life of the Late Lord Lytton," Lippincott's Magazine, Vol. 14, July - Dec. 1874.
 2. Robert, Earl of Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.
 3. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, Appendix II.

difficulties for he " . . . induced the House to appoint a committee of inquiry into the drama, with a view to extinguishing the monopoly then enjoyed by the two royal theatres."¹ Two of Bulwer's late and little known plays, Darnley and Walpole, dealt indirectly with political situations; even The Lady of Lyons, his early success, was falsely accused of promulgating revolutionary tendencies.

As has been previously mentioned, Bulwer-Lytton's writings were immediately popular with the public and immediately criticized severely by the literary critics. The reviewer for The Living Age praises Bulwer for not letting his popularity mar his skill:

Perhaps no popular writer has had greater temptations to encourage, in the growth and application of his genius, what certainly no man has more steadily chastened and subdued. As the brilliance of success never gave him overweening confidence, neither has occasional non-success damped his energy or betrayed his just confidence in the power which has at last won general and earnest recognition.²

He achieved a phenomenal popular success, both in public recognition and in sorely needed remuneration. The "beau ideal" of his day, Bulwer satisfied the romantic standard that a man should succeed at everything his hand touched. Some ladies, grateful that "Pelhamism" (from his first novel, Pelham) had cast out "Byronism," gave him a splendid dressing-

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1. Bulwer-Lytton, Robert, "Sketch of the Political Life of the Late Lord Lytton," Lippincott's Magazine, Vol. 14, July - Dec., 1874.
 2. "The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Bart," a review, The Living Age, Vol. 33, Apr. - June, 1852.

case with a variety of hand-looking glasses, an indication of his great personal appeal.

His wife, perversely enough, did everything in her power to hinder his career; but her spiteful efforts, caused by jealousy of his literary fame, only increased his popularity. Lyndon Orr says of her jealous bitterness,

His young wife, who ought to have appreciated the sacrifice which he had made for her, failed utterly to understand it. In the course of a few years, she began to feel that she was deeply wronged. Her mind became perverted with a sense of bitterness and her whole nature appeared gradually to change.¹

She so confused facts with fancy that one can put little credence in her accounts of what actually happened. Her persecution of him continued for fifty-five years until her death. She even wrote two novels, Very Successful, and The World and His Wife, in which, under thin disguises, he was held up for reprobation. She published many vituperative pamphlets at her own expense, for no publisher would take them. She even reviled her husband in letters to his constituents when he was seeking office. When one of Bulwer's plays was to be presented at Devonshire House, a benefit performance for indigent actors, Mrs. Bulwer threatened to secure admission and to throw an egg at the Queen. Yet, his wife's scandalous complaints succeeded only in arousing public curiosity and in augmenting Bulwer's increasing popularity.

1. Lyndon Orr, "Bulwer-Lytton as a Husband," The Bookman, Vol. 23, May, 1906.

Not only was Bulwer personally popular, but his novels, and later his plays, were a great financial success. Bulwer-Lytton came on the English scene simultaneously with Disraeli, representing a reaction from the tragedy of the Napoleonic wars to the cynicism and frivolity which then constituted the English form of dandyism. His novel, "Pelham," left a permanent mark on society in the advice of the hero's mother to her son, to wear black for evening dress, ". . . for people must be distinguished to do so."¹ Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine says, ". . . of Bulwer's success there is as little doubt as of his versatility, and we should not condemn too heavily the vanity of him who won all the suffrages."²

Bulwer-Lytton's popularity was indeed surpassed only by his extraordinary versatility. Edmund Gosse is amazed at Bulwer's varied literary skill:

If we examine his books, we must be astonished at their variety. He treated the social life of his own day, he dived into spectral romance, he revived the beautiful ceremonies of antiquity, he evoked the great shades of English and of continental history - he wrote comedies and tragedies, epics and epistles, satires and lyrics. His canvasses were myriad, and he crowded everyone of them with figures. Perhaps his best claim to regard is the insatiability of his human curiosity, evinced in the almost infinite variety of his compositions.³

Critics generally agree that one of the greatest reasons

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1. Michael Sadleir, Bulwer, a Panorama; Edward and Rosina, (1803-1836) London, 1931.
 2. "Bulwer-Lytton, the Man and His Work," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 173, May, 1903.
 3. Edmund Gosse, "Life of Bulwer-Lytton," The Fortnightly Review, Vol. 100, Dec. 1913.

for Bulwer's popularity was that, except in a few rare intervals of unusual talent, he was nothing more than the high expression of his age. One literary critic has remarked of Bulwer's idealism in his writings:

. . . he gives you the impression that he writes with no other object than to elevate the race. He is consumed by a fierce flame of sentimentality. . . . Not only himself, but the heroes of his creation seem to wear a halo about their heads.¹

Furthermore, Michael Sadleir, in his book has found it difficult to separate the author from his characters:

The great obstacle to any appraisal of him [Bulwer] as a writer is the manifold variety of his disguises. He is forever pretending and not only to the world but to himself, also. Further, he was that difficult blend of creative artist and student of literature who almost inevitably develops a literary, side by side with a human personality, and inclines to elaborate the former into as many sub-personalities as knowledge or fancy may suggest. Thus, self-consciousness became his natural medium of expression.²

So successful were Bulwer's first novels that he even dared to publish later ones anonymously, to the dismay of his publishers, yet with shrewd success. He even used Pelham, his first novel, as a means of identification and, for years, was content to be known as "The Author of Pelham." People liked the smart phrasing and witty catch-phrases. Bulwer not only manufactured such phrases by the gross, (among his dramas, Money is the best example of this) but he also performed the

1. "The First Lord Lytton," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 194, July - Dec. 1913.

2. Michael Sadleir, Bulwer, a Panorama, Edward and Rosina, Vol. 1, (1803-1836).

exceedingly difficult task of persuading the public to read them.

It was this popularity that gave Bulwer courage to write for the difficult theatre and that furnished the critics with occasion for more attacks. Lewis Melville, in The Bookman, has praised Bulwer's ability to retain his popularity, in spite of many obstacles:

Though during his life he was attacked with almost unparalleled bitterness, since his death, the critics have left him severely alone, which is an unaccountable neglect considering some of his really great works. . . . Praise must always be the portion of this literate author for the untiring and unflagging industry which he displayed; and because, in spite of almost overwhelming temptation to over-production, he always wrote with care and never put upon a market, awaiting his work with open arms, a book indifferently written.¹

There were many reasons for the antagonistic attitude of the critics; it began when Bulwer first won the prize at Cambridge for his poem, "Sculpture." Fraser's Magazine then lampooned this precocious youngster who dared to rival men already established in the field of literature. He was called "a horrid puppy," "conceited," and "insufferably dull." This attitude was later taken up by other critical journals and continued to be their general opinion of Bulwer from 1830 to 1860. Thus, his early critics had based their criticism on his works; indeed, since the young man was truly handsome, well-born, precocious, egoistic, then pampered by his mother,

1. Lewis Melville, "The Centenary of Bulwer-Lytton," The Bookman, Vol. 17, July, 1903.

and extremely opinionated, it is reasonable to assume that his personality had been so objectionable to his literary elders that they were unwilling to judge his work without prejudice. This attitude, first taken by Fraser's Magazine, was persistently pursued by his critics for many years. Although most of the contemporary periodicals criticized Bulwer, yet some ardently championed him; Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and The Fortnightly Review were as frequently his partisans as Fraser's Magazine was the leader of his enemies. In one of the articles in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Lytton is even linked with Shakespeare as a dramatist, and his Money is mentioned as a "play that has remained a classic for sixty years."¹

Michael Sadleir attributes to jealousy the hostility of Lockhart, who came to London in 1825 as editor of The Quarterly.² Lockhart deprecated Bulwer in The Quarterly, and Bulwer gave back in his The New Monthly better than he received. Lockhart, then, with Maginn and Thackeray, used Fraser's Magazine, still relentlessly hostile, to publish savage diatribes against Bulwer. Furthermore, Charles M. Westmacott, who, as the social scavenger of the day, edited The Age, was on his trail; and it was upon Westmacott that

1. "The Victorian Drama," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 167, Jan. 1900, pp. 98-100.

2. Sadleir, Michael, Bulwer, a Panorama, 1803-1836, London, 1931.

Bulwer turned with pardonable fury.

The critics also criticized Bulwer's work as "theatrical," "artificial as to style," and "affected in sentiment." His works, especially his plays, are indeed full of exalted sentiment and flowery speeches, one reason for their popularity with the public; but this was the fault of the age rather than of the individual. The critics' antagonism was also due to a misunderstanding. For, his literary contemporaries, not knowing his economic and financial needs, resented his entering the field of professional writing, and bitterly censured this son of a wealthy woman for taking bread from the mouth of poor authors. Bulwer-Lytton was usually too proud and disdainful to explain.

Furthermore, Bulwer apparently lost his head completely at his phenomenal success, for his works were immediately "best sellers," a popular success because of a universal public acclaim, which aroused the hostile envy of the critics. Yet, his works, like his education and training, were a fine blend of worldliness and Byronism, of high society and raffishness. They alternately bristled with epigram and rustled with pomposity. Sentimental and sparkling by turns, invariably successful, how could their public reception fail to assure the author that he was, in very truth, a man of genius? "Even at the moment when he was the hero of every parlor in England," said Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, "he was pleased

to insist that he was misunderstood, that the press was in a conspiracy to ruin him."¹

Bulwer constantly assumed a belligerent attitude toward the critics and seemed to await their diatribes. Many of their criticisms he disdainfully ignored; others he attacked with bitter rebuttal. Few writers have encountered, in their own time and after their death, so much adverse criticism and have survived it. The reviewers were unwilling ever to give him any literary credit, and it was a constant source of resentment to him. The Quarterly Review never mentioned Bulwer without contempt until 1865, when the publication of his works, in forty-three volumes, forced it to consider this indefatigable and popular writer with a measure of respect.

I have mentioned these facts in Bulwer-Lytton's life which I have felt were pertinent to the high point of his biography, from the view of this thesis, namely, why and how he became a dramatist. I have explained his early interest in and talent for literature, his habits of voracious reading which furnished the background for his historical novels and plays, his necessity for rapid and prolific writing, the popularity and financial success of his earlier works, his fight with the critics for literary recognition, the correlation between his political and literary careers, and the

1. "Bulwer-Lytton, the Man and His Work," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 173, May, 1903.

biographical references in his writings to his conflict between his mother and his wife. Bulwer-Lytton, in 1836, was a popular hero, a success to his publishers, and a target for the critics when, because of his friendship for William Macready, he decided to enter the unfamiliar and difficult field of the drama. Diametrically opposite to his novelist's beginning was Bulwer's entrance as a dramatist; whereas his first novels were an immediate popular and financial success, lampooned by the critics, and seldom read after his own lifetime, yet his first play was a failure, none of his dramas were financial successes and were only indifferently treated by the critics. Yet, three of his plays were successfully produced long after his death. His historical drama, Richelieu, is even considered a classic and is often produced in a Shakespearean repertoire.

Because of Macready's expressed desire to render the theatre worthy of the patronage of intelligent folk, Bulwer-Lytton himself first wrote for the stage, although several of his novels had already been dramatized. These are some of the comments that were later made about these dramatized novels:

One of the earliest experiments of the Bowery Theatre in the season of 1830-1831 was the dramatization of Paul Clifford, given Sept. 28, 1830. . . . Mrs. Hamblin played Lucy Brandon, and it is probable that she made the dramatization of Paul Clifford, as she did later of other Bulwer books . . . a play on Paul Clifford was also acted at Covent Garden Theatre, in Nov., 1835 . . . Eugene Aram was published in 1832. The tragic story at once engaged the

dramatists, and subsequent collaboration of skillful adaptors and able actors has confirmed its popularity on the stage in a degree beyond anything else with the Bulwer stamp. One of the first versions was that produced at the Surrey Theatre, London, in 1832, the work of W. T. Moncrief, the playwright.¹

To prove further that Bulwer was a good judge of dramatic material,

. . . it is interesting to put in evidence the fact that while the novelist was writing Eugene Aram he became so impressed with the dramatic value of the story that he set to work upon a tragedy of the same theme, and abandoned the work only after he had completed two acts. This fragment has appeared as an addendum to the novel.²

"The Last Days of Pompeii has been many times dramatized and has engaged the services of a historical list of American players. The first theatre was the Adelphia in 1834."³ It is thus evident that Bulwer-Lytton was sufficiently interested in the drama and sufficiently confident, because of these dramatizations, to give eager attention to Macready's desire to "elevate the stage."

Friendly relations with William Macready and admiration for that actor's gallant attempt to advance his art, turned Bulwer's attention to the stage,⁴ but the circumstances of the time influenced the shaping of the works, the selection of effects, and even the language in which they were expressed.⁵

Bulwer-Lytton's first attempt at drama was a play, Cromwell, which was never produced, although it was published by Bradshaw

1. P. Wiltach, "Dramatizations of Bulwer-Lytton," The Bookman, Vol. 17, July, 1903, pp. 471-6.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Loc. cit.

4. E. B. Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson, Appendix II.

5. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton, Chicago: W. M. Hill, 1914.

and Knight in May, 1837. Macready, in his diary, tells why:

Aug. 12, 1836. Read over with great attention Bulwer's play of Cromwell . . . after dinner, we discussed the subject of Cromwell; Bulwer listened with great equanimity and finally decided on delaying the publication, considering our respective suggestions as to the alteration of the plot and recasting it . . . Aug. 28, 1836. Endeavored to come to some decision with regard to the plot of Bulwer's play, but find it more difficult than I had supposed; on one point I am clear, that to make a play of Cromwell, he must begin "de novo" and be content to lose all he has already done; patchwork never is of value.¹

After this abortive attempt, once more Bulwer-Lytton wrote a play again on a historical theme, The Duchess de La Valliere. Bulwer seemed more sure of himself in the field of historical plot; for he had already sufficient difficulties to encounter, with unfamiliar characterization and dialogue in addition to the difficult stagecraft, then necessarily important because of the poor lighting, large theatres with poor acoustics, and the large "apron" stage. Macready's diary tells this story,

. . . he [Bulwer] told me that he had written a play . . . that the subject was La Valliere. He handed me a paper, in which I read that it was dedicated to myself . . . He wished me to read the play, give my opinion, and that he would make any alterations I might suggest.²

In his entries for February 24th and 25th, Macready tells of his discussion with Bulwer about the new play and of suggested revisions. Since Bulwer had never actually written for the stage before and was cognizant of the abortive Cromwell,³ he

1. William Macready, Reminiscences, Diaries, and Letters, edited by F. Pollack, 1875.

2. Ibid., entry for Feb. 23, 1836.

3. No copy of Cromwell is now available.

depended very much upon Macready's practical knowledge.

Bulwer's economic needs forced him to drive a hard bargain; for he insisted upon "£ 200 down, and £ 5 per night to be paid through the two following seasons, after which the copy-right to revert to him."¹

Bulwer's verbosity and intricately involved situations, which had been popular in his novels, were unsuited to the stage; Macready, from the first, had misgivings about the dramatic success of The Duchess de La Valliere. He deprecated Bulwer's enthusiasm by remarking, "Authors are no judges of the performances of their own plays."² Bulwer genuinely appreciated Macready's revisions and usually followed his suggestions implicitly; because, even on the opening night, the author expressed to Macready his gratitude for the actor's making him cut out the first scene of the fifth act; which is still included in the reading version. Macready felt that this scene was more suitable for reading than for acting.

Macready's vanity as well as his knowledge of theatre

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1. William Macready, Reminiscences, Diaries, and Letters, edited by F. Pollack, 1875, entry for Feb. 25, 1836. According to the Author's Act of 1833, for the first time in English history, acting rights were secured to authors; the play was not to be given without the author's consent. A kind of authors' union was then formed; it established an unwritten and often violated law providing for the following royalties: for a 5-act tragedy or comedy, £ 10 a night; for a 2-act piece, £ 7; and £ 5 for a one-act interlude (information from Watson's Sheridan to Robertson, Appendix II).
 2. Ibid., entry for Jan. 3, 1837.

audiences made him insistent upon a "top-heavy" stellar role at the expense of lesser characters; then, too, he realized that often minor roles were so poorly played that they were never understood by the audiences. Bulwer would have done better to have profited by Macready's experience on this important detail; for The Duchess de La Valliere is teeming with a multitude of minor characters who only add to the general confusion of the plot. E. G. Bell explains Macready's reason for insisting upon an augmented stellar role;

A pardonable desire for self-display, combined with a distrust of the abilities of his supporting company, caused Macready to insist upon the augmentation of the importance of the character he elected to impersonate, regardless of other considerations; and his phenomenal ability frequently won success for plays thus mutilated.¹

Bulwer's success in the field of the novel had always been swift and sure; but, from the first, he was fearful about the reception of his plays. The continued bitter and hostile attacks of the critics made him less confident though more determined; unruly theatre audiences as well as the unfamiliar form of dramatic writing increased his fear for the play's reception. Yet, mindful of his popularity with the public, he appeals directly to the audience in his prologue to The Duchess de La Valliere:

The mightiest critic is the Public Voice. Awed, yet resigned, our novice trusts in you . . . The soul has instincts wiser than the schools! Yours is the great

1. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton, chapter on "Bulwer's Connection with the Stage."

Tribunal of the Heart. . . . To you a stranger has
referred his cause. . . .¹

This poetic appeal, however, was not regarded; for, brought out at Covent Garden Theatre, January 4, 1837, the play was withdrawn after nine performances. Published immediately afterwards by the Messrs. Saunders and Otley, it has since then retained its repute simply as a "closet" drama.²

After the failure of his first play, Bulwer relied more implicitly upon Macready's judgment and practical knowledge of the stage; hence there was evolved a dramatic collaboration which was of benefit to them both. Although many of Macready's revisions were for the purpose of increasing the stellar role at the expense of necessary minor characters, yet, because of Macready's collaboration, Bulwer's plays gradually emerged from "closet" drama into successful stage productions. For, The Lady of Lyons, which was dashed off a year later, literally upon the spur of the moment, achieved a brilliant success. Macready, one day while talking over the responsibilities of the Covent Garden Management to Bulwer, exclaimed, "Oh! that I could get a play like the 'Honeymoon'."³ Within a fortnight from the utterance of that ejaculation, the manuscript of The Lady of Lyons was placed as a gift in the hands of Macready. Brought out anonymously, on Thursday, February 15, 1838, this

1. Bulwer-Lytton, The Duchess de La Valliere, prologue to Act I.
2. In the succeeding chapter, an analysis of The Duchess de La Valliere will be given, in which I shall discuss its lack of merit as an acted play, and its interest as a "closet" drama.
3. An unusually popular play written by John Tobin and first produced in 1805.

play had a triumphant reception; and at the close of another fortnight, the authorship was acknowledged upon the play bills.¹

The Lady of Lyons not only had a long and successful run, under Macready's management, but was revived periodically for many years afterward. Alfred Bates, in 1903, said, "Few plays have been so successful or retained so firm a hold upon the public esteem; indeed Bulwer-Lytton has been justly said to be almost the only modern English author of eminence who has succeeded in writing plays capable of keeping the stage so long."² Furthermore, The Lady of Lyons became so familiar to the public and so widely discussed that even "Mr. Punch" (the anonymous editor of the amusingly satirical magazine, Punch) write a clever sequel to it, changing the ending somewhat. The sequel, entitled In The Lyons Den, was a very witty, satirical farce about an encounter between the families of the hero and heroine, who came from widely divergent strata of society.

The sequel throws a lurid light on how the vulgar and purse-proud family of Deschappeles and the humble Melnottes would get on together. And "Mr. Punch" prides himself upon the fact that, in writing it, great pains have been taken to make the blank verse, wherever possible, as bad as Lord Lytton's.³

This quoted excerpt shows the continued hostility of the critics,

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1. Prefatory note to the Knebworth Edition of Bulwer-Lytton's Plays, 1882.
 2. Bates, Alfred, The Drama, preface to Vol. 22, Cambridge, England, 1903.
 3. Loc. cit.

even in the humorous magazines; but the public was as amused by the sequel as it had been interested in the play.

E. G. Bell says of the ability of the press to ruin a popular play:

The conjunction of an able playwright and a competent and appreciative audience may be made ineffectual by press hostility. Bulwer-Lytton, the greatest artist of the Nineteenth Century, wrote a number of acting plays. The critics ridiculed and depreciated his every production. To gain a fair hearing, it was necessary to conceal the authorship of one, which under the shelter of anonymity, achieved an immense popularity. When its parentage became known, it was abused with redoubled but ineffectual fury.¹

The meagre remuneration then given to even the most successful dramatists was insufficient for Bulwer's needs; he, therefore, wrote plays merely for Macready, at the same time continuing in other forms of literature for his own and his family's support. Yet, he was doggedly determined to achieve the fame in the drama that he had already gained in the novel; so, for four years he persisted, triumphing with Richelieu (March 7, 1839), The Sea Captain (October 31, 1839), later readapted as The Rightful Heir and Money (December 8, 1840).

Having demonstrated his ability to succeed despite the press, and not being under the necessity of subjecting himself to malignant misrepresentation, he abandoned the field, although a series of works which he considered the best of his plays [Cromwell, Junius, and others in manuscript form, which were left, among his papers, to his son] had never been performed.²

Macready finally found that the management of a London

1. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer, chapter on "Prerequisites to Great Plays."

2. Ibid.

theatre was unprofitable; and on February 26, 1851, his farewell dinner took place under the presidency of Bulwer-Lytton; even the Prince Consort sent complimentary messages both to Macready and to Bulwer. With Macready's retirement, the author lost all incentive to write for the professional stage. His later plays were usually presented by amateur and semi-professional organizations, and for charitable purposes; and, as a result, they are little known. For, Bulwer's dramatic fame and financial success in this branch of literature indeed ended with Macready's retirement, since only those plays corrected and produced by Macready have survived his own generation.

His later play Not So Bad as We Seem, was written, like The Lady of Lyons, in obedience to a sudden impulse and with singular rapidity.

It originated one winter's evening in the banqueting hall at Knebworth [Bulwer's country estate] after some amateur theatricals, the actors in which were a cluster of artists and men-of-letters, pre-eminent among whom was Charles Dickens. Lord Lytton and his guests projected together the establishment of a benevolent institution . . . to be called "The Guild of Art and Literature." In furtherance of this project the host had said, "Undertake to act a play yourselves and I engage to write it." Hence the production of this five-act drama . . . The play, which rapidly poured £ 3,000 into the coffers of the newly-created Guild, was first performed on Friday, May 16th, 1851, in the presence of Her Majesty and the Prince Consort, in a temporary theatre erected in the late Duke of Devonshire's town house in Picadilly.¹

The Sea Captain, first produced by Macready in 1839, was

I. Bulwer-Lytton, prefatory note to the Knebworth Edition of His Writings.

rewritten as The Rightful Heir and produced by a mediocre cast at the Lyceum Theatre, October 3, 1868. Very little public attention was given to this play, according to the available material I have found. There is no record that Walpole, a play which incorporated many of Bulwer's political ideas, and which was written about 1871, was ever produced professionally; yet it was read eagerly as a "closet" drama by his devoted public.

The play, Darnley, was left unfinished at Bulwer's death in 1873. His son, finding it among Bulwer's papers, and having heard his father discuss it "as a most powerful domestic drama," felt that it was "too vigorous and valuable a specimen of the author's dramatic workmanship to be permanently withheld from the public."¹ He, thus, engaged a Mr. Coghlan to write the fifth act.

It was placed upon the stage [October 6, 1877] at the Court Theatre with great intelligence and expense: And I am assured by all who witnessed it that Mr. Hare's impersonation of Mainwaring was one of his most finished and admirable performances. Nevertheless, the play was not successful; and after a short run, it was withdrawn. Translated into German, it had been simultaneously produced in Vienna, at the Burg Theatre, by some of the best actors in Europe. . . . The audience followed the progress of the play with animated and increasing interest to the close of the fourth act. But its permanent interest as a drama could not survive the anti-climax of the fifth act.²

Bulwer's son, therefore, reasons that the play would have been successful had it been completely written by his father; he,

1. Preface to Darnley, written by Robert Bulwer-Lytton in the Knebworth edition of Bulwer-Lytton's works, May, 1882.

2. Loc. cit.

accordingly wrote another ending which seemed more suitable to his father's notes. The Knebworth edition of Bulwer-Lytton's works gives both endings.

Although his experiences as a playwright were of great importance in Bulwer's artistic development, and directly influenced both his subsequent and contemporaneous writings,¹ and although he wrote many successes which added to his literary fame, "yet his experiences destroyed whatever illusions he may once have had regarding the stage, and he discouraged his son in his desire to write plays."²

1. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton, chapter on "Bulwer's Connection with the Stage."

2. Loc. cit.

PART TWO
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS
OF BULWER-LYTTON

FOREWORD

Bulwer-Lytton wrote eight plays which were produced, acted and afterwards published;¹ these plays can be classified, for purposes of analysis, according to their subject matter. I shall, therefore, divide them into four groups of two plays each, as follows: first, historical plays, The Duchess de La Valliere and Richelieu; second, comedies, The Lady of Lyons and Money; third, plays dealing with the theme of family honor, The Rightful Heir and Not So Bad As We Seem; and fourth, plays dealing with political thought or public life, Walpole and Darnley. Bulwer-Lytton's fame as a dramatist, however, rests almost entirely upon only three, Richelieu, The Lady of Lyons, and Money; many writers of a later period have not even mentioned his other plays.

I shall divide this analysis into two chapters: the first, dealing with those dramas grouped as historical plays and as comedies, which were written for Macready and produced at Drury Lane, and the second, with those written on the theme of love and honor and of political thought, produced by amateur and semi-professional groups.

1. The Knebworth edition of Bulwer-Lytton's plays, published in 1882, with prefatory notes by his son, is the text used in this analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

**PLAYS WRITTEN BY BULWER-LYTTON
FOR WILLIAM MACREADY**

CHAPTER THREE

PLAYS WRITTEN BY BULWER-LYTTON FOR WILLIAM MACREADY

Bulwer-Lytton began his career as a playwright in the field of historical drama; first, because his reading gave him the necessary background material for his plots, and second, because this type of drama would have an appeal to the wide circle of readers of his novels. Thus, his first play, The Duchess de La Valliere, a dramatic failure, and Richelieu, his great success, both derive their plots from historical incidents. Even his bitterest critics could find no fault with his historical accuracy, as the following comments indicate:

Lytton carefully planned each of his stories on a vast canvas. A great reader, he was careful to choose a sound historical basis, and the authorities have been unable to detect any flaws of moment.¹

Bulwer-Lytton's play [Richelieu] although written before much of the modern historical research into Richelieu's life, actually preserves this portrait of the Cardinal with fidelity and understanding. It manages to do this without in any way interfering with the dramatic interest of the plot.²

Bulwer's son attributed his father's accurate historical information and his vivid imaginative ability to his reading; "although his life was passed in writing for the public, the

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1. Lewis Melville, "The Centenary of Bulwer-Lytton," The Bookman, Vol. 17, July 1903, pp. 463-465.
 2. R. D. Skinner, "Richelieu, A Criticism," Commonweal, Vol. II, Jan. 22, 1930, p. 341.

fact is that, at every period of it, he read more than he wrote and wrote more than he published."¹

The source material of The Duchess de La Valliere deals with "an early episode in that grandiose epic of artifice and intrigue, the reign of Louis XIV."² The theme of the play is the conflict between love and honor often found in Bulwer's works; a virtuous noblewoman, Louise de La Valliere, stifles her ideals of honor to become the mistress of Louis XIV until, at length, her own feelings of dishonor and shame force her to leave her lover's palace and become a nun. In this conflict of love against conscience, conscience is triumphant, for Louise is made to realize that even a great love may degrade one's soul. Bulwer has been sharply criticized for this unusual portrayal of the love element; Fraser's Magazine, for instance, even his most hostile critic, comments upon the apparent paradox of the character of Louise:

It seems to us that he [Bulwer] is conscious of having pitched the character of the poetical La Valliere too high for the degradation of the historical La Valliere; into which, nevertheless, his plan compelled him to cast her . . . May not this want of adequate motive to account for the fall of La Valliere be traced to a yet deeper mistake, that of making love the agency of degrading such a spirit? Where, in Shakespeare, will Bulwer find a deteriorating influence exercised by genuine affection?³

In the end of the play, it is the heroic soldier, Bragelone,

1. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton, 1883.
2. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton.
3. "Duchess de La Valliere," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 16, Aug. 1837.

played by Macready, who has loved Louise nobly but vainly, who shows her the way to expiate her sin. There is also a lesser plot intrigue and jealousy among the court, notably that of Madame de Montespan and Lauzun.

The theme of *La Valliere* offended the moral sense of many Victorians, although it met with ". . . considerable success and so far encouraged the author that he shortly put forth another dramatic venture upon the stream of public opinion."¹ E. G. Bell, however, does not think that the love element of this play is contrary to Victorian standards:

The interest is a consequence of the alternation of passions and mental struggles; love and conscience are in perpetual conflict, and loyalty contends with the sense of wrong in *Bragelone*. The strongest scene is that between king and monk [*Bragelone*], the effective situations are at the close of the second act and at the end of the play. The catastrophe, the self-burial of a young and beautiful woman, is singularly awe-inspiring and impressive.²

Although Fraser's Magazine further criticizes Bulwer's treatment of the love plot, I think that the fault does not lie with Bulwer but with his time, for he had to adapt the historical fact of king's having mistresses to the Victorian conventions of morality; his only alternative, therefore, was to show the triumph of conscience over a love which was not acceptable to Victorian society, yet, at the same time to retain the dramatic effect of his play. In my opinion, Bulwer

1. "Bulwer's Dramatic Poetry," a review, Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 15, March, 1840, pp. 267-284.

2. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton.

did this admirably; a contemporary, however, viewed Bulwer's treatment differently:

Such a writer as Mr. Bulwer never was meant to follow in the wake of second and third rate dramatists . . . and there was subsequently demanded of him a sounder philosophy in the selection of his agencies. If the facts of history would not serve the development of his conception, the subject was badly chosen, and he should have sought another. Or, if he was determined to dramatize the tinsel glories of Versailles, he should have molded his La Valliere accordingly . . . If in the fall of La Valliere, there be a philosophical incongruity, in her recovery there is an obsolete conventionalism. Taking the veil is not a catastrophe for an English acting drama. It is a conclusion that does not realize itself in our imagination; it wants power and finality.¹

In The Duchess de La Valliere Bulwer showed a great understanding of a woman's nature, for which even Fraser's Magazine praised him.

Scattered through this play there are many original passages evincing a deep insight - far deeper, indeed, than any elsewhere to be met with - into the mysteries of the human heart. When the other maidens of honor are bantering Louise as to the chance of her falling in love with Louis, she is made to answer,

"Nay, ev'n the very presence of his greatness,
Exalts the heart from each more low temptation.
He seems to walk the earth as if to raise
And purify our wandering thoughts, by fixing
Thought on himself; and she who thinks on Louis
Shuts out the world, and scorns the name of Love!"

The maid of honor to whom the rhapsody is addressed, agrees with this opinion; for she says with much naivete, "Wait till you are tried."²

The chief fault in the plot of La Valliere is, in my opinion, his habit of building up a situation and a speech to

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1. "Duchess de La Valliere," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 16, Aug. 1837, pp. 179-86.
 2. Loc. cit.

heroic proportions only to change suddenly to a thought so prosaic as to make it seem absurd. ". . . the sublime is overstepped, and the one step taken which leaves the author knee-deep in the ridiculous."¹ The characters in The Duchess de La Valliere are each clearly defined as a personification of some idealistic concept; moreover, they must have seemed very realistic to Bulwer's audiences, for even Fraser's Magazine reversed its customary policy of hostility sufficiently to praise Bulwer's characterization:

His [Bulwer's] genius has taken service with reality. In every event he has wrought out, in every character he has created, he has never had the actual out of mind; and his works are living pictures, filled with the crimes and virtues, the thoughts and the feelings, the hopes and the fears which are now among us in daily operation.²

The source material for Richelieu was also historical, and with the background likewise gained from Bulwer's thorough reading of French history.³ He was determined to create a character worthy of Macready's great talents, one of dramatic interest and yet historically accurate; and to this end he made many revisions of his original plot. Even Macready doubted the authenticity of Bulwer's historical background. ". . . he [Bulwer] has made him [Richelieu] resort to low jest, which outrages one's notions of the ideal of Cardinal

1. "Duchess de La Valliere," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 16, Aug. 1837, pp. 179-86.

2. "Autobiography of Edward Bulwer-Lytton," a review, Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 3, 1831, p. 713.

3. "Richelieu," Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 82, Nov. 1873, pp. 626-634.

Richelieu, with all his vanity, suppleness, and craft."¹
 Subsequent dramatic critics, however, have agreed that
 Bulwer's historical information about the Cardinal was
 much more accurate than Macready had thought.

The plot of Richelieu deals with the intrigues at the
 French court in the time of the great Cardinal, of evil men
 employing unscrupulous means to gain mastery over the weak
 king, and of Richelieu's diabolical cleverness in foiling
 his enemies and saving his France. The love story of Julie,
 the Cardinal's niece, and de Mauprat, the noble adventurer,
 is subordinated to the theme of patriotism. The plot of
Richelieu may be compared with that of The Duchess de La
Valliere as follows: first, both deal with incidents of
 French history, in which the king plays an important part.
 In Richelieu, however, the events occur within a few days,
 and the plot is closely knit, while in La Valliere, the inci-
 dents are drawn out over many years, and, consequently, the
 dramatic sequence is not so easy to follow. Both plays deal
 with themes of "uplift," an idea which was quite character-
 istic of Bulwer; in one, there is the ennobling power of con-
 science, and in the other, of patriotism. In La Valliere,
 the plot situations are predominant over the characterization,
 while in Richelieu, the character of the Cardinal dominates

1. William Macready, Reminiscences, Diaries, and Letters,
 edited by F. Pollack, entry for Feb. 20, 1839.

the situations. In the former, the chief character is Louise, played originally by Helen Faucit; in the latter, the character of Richelieu, portrayed by Macready, is all-important. Both have a melodramatic climax; when Louise de La Valliere refuses to return to Louis' palace, and clings to the convent cross; and when Richelieu apparently rises from the dead to confront his enemies. It is easy to see the improvement of the plot of Richelieu over that of The Duchess de La Valliere, for, in Richelieu, the incidents are more closely woven, the dramatic effects are greater and yet more natural, and the ending is much more logical. Both plays are tragic in their scope, and only miss being actual tragedy by the ultimate triumph of the ideal.

The dramatic construction of Richelieu seems, to me, to have been better developed than in any other of Bulwer-Lytton's plays; for Bulwer was intensely interested in the dramatic possibilities of the historical material, and Macready was aware of the histrionic potentialities of the Cardinal's role. In fact, the dramatic situations in Richelieu were so carefully worked out that the editors of Temple Bar praised it superlatively:

The pre-eminent merit of the play lies in its admirable construction. It contains sufficient situations and climaxes to bring down the curtains upon half a dozen of the milk-and-water productions of modern playwrights. Most telling is the climax of the third act, where the Cardinal, in a remarkably fine scene, gains over de Mauprat and baffles the conspirators by feigning death; still finer is the scene in the fourth act, in the garden of the

Tuilleries, where, threatening Baradas with the curse of Rome, he protects Julie from his machinations. But this is again excelled by the last scene, in which climax rises upon climax until the last powerful culmination, where Richelieu, apparently in the last gasp, suddenly springs up from his half-swooning condition, tramples upon the paper which brings the tidings of revolt and danger, and once more asserts himself the great minister of France.¹

In the two historical plays, the names of the characters do not suggest their type, as in many of Bulwer's later plays. In both La Valliere and Richelieu, the characterizations are strongly drawn, as is typical of heroic and historical drama; the critics, moreover, react vehemently to the characters in The Duchess de La Valliere, as the following excerpts will prove. Fraser's Magazine, consistently Bulwer's most bitter enemy, indulged in caustic sarcasm:

Even the character of Bragelone [Bulwer intended this to be the star role, played by Macready] does not come up to expectations; brave he unquestionably is, high-thoughted and high-spirited, but, from the first, he comes before us as nothing more than a middle-aged gentleman, blindly in love with a very young girl, and laboring under the delusion that, because he is virtuous, there are to be no more cakes and ale. In almost every scene, we find him talking nonsense . . . he makes a most pathetic appeal.²

Compare with this the praise of E. G. Bell, in his book on Bulwer-Lytton:

Bragelone is the finest and greatest of the characters, a role which delighted Macready. In him the disappearing old warrior nobles have a worthy representative, brave, loyal,

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1. "Lord Lytton as a Dramatist and Novelist," by "The Author of Mirabeau," Temple Bar, Vol. 38, April-July, 1873, pp. 232-245.
 2. "Duchess de La Valliere," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 16, Aug. 1837, pp. 179-86.

unselfish and sincere; his natural dignity and manliness brought into contact with the falsely-great humbles and reduces to their proper proportions both courtier and king . . . His only weakness is his ill-placed affection, and it is in conformity with the traditions of his class that when dishonor comes near him, he sickens of the world and adopts the cowl of the monk.¹

Bulwer-Lytton seems to have taken infinite pains with the characterization of even the smallest parts in La Valliere; for as I studied the play, I was able to visualize definitely each character. Bell also praises the treatment of the minor characters:

Launuz [the villain] has an importance beyond what is disclosed in his easy and supercilious progress among courtiers whom he moves, uses, and despises . . . the evil of despotism is illustrated in the character of Madame de Montespan, as beauty degraded into a plaything becomes wasteful, conscienceless, and flaunting.²

Bulwer's best characterization in The Duchess de La Valliere is, in my opinion, that of Louise de La Valliere, a role as ably played by Helen Faucit as that of Bragelone was played by Macready. The author has written this part with great tenderness; and many critics see in the gentle, idealistic Louise, Bulwer's first love, a tender, ethereal creature whose name does not figure in his biographies but whose impression upon his youth was indelible. Bell comments upon the gracious tenderness of the character, La Valliere:

The epithet tender was generally applied to her. A resigned sadness characterized her demeanor, she sought

1. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton.
2. Loc. cit.

vainly for consolation, and her real feelings were a bitter commentary on the envy she excited. . . . La Vallieres are by no means rare in the ranks of young womanhood. Those in whom the heart is stronger than the head have the greatest need of the protection which the conventions of society have established, and in all cases where these usages are disregarded, sorrow and misery are the consequences. This is the warning lesson of the play.¹

To conclude the characterization of La Valliere, I agree with E. G. Bell in his comments; for I consider these characters to be strongly portrayed and entirely consistent throughout the play. My opinion, like Mr. Bell's, however, is based entirely upon the reading version; whereas the editors of Fraser's Magazine and North American Review saw the play acted with poor performers in all but the stellar roles, and before an impatient audience. Furthermore, their personal hostility toward and jealousy of Bulwer must have greatly prejudiced their comments.

The critics² have made only favorable comments upon the characterizations in Richelieu; this probably was due first to the fact that Bulwer collaborated more closely with Macready and followed his every suggestion, and second, to

1. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton.
2. "Bulwer's Dramatic Poetry," Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 15, March, 1840, pp. 267-284.
B. O. Flower, "Dramas and Poems of Bulwer-Lytton," Arena, Vol. 32, Nov. 1904, pp. 563-64.
"Richelieu," Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 82, Nov. 1873, pp. 626-634.
"Richelieu," Theatre, Vol. 9, July-Dec., 1882, p. 75.
R. D. Skinner, "Richelieu," Commonweal, Vol. 11, Jan. 22, 1930, p. 341.

the predominance of the stellar role. This characterization has been included in the repertory of almost every serious actor¹ from William Macready to Walter Hampden; for few roles can display histrionic ability like that of the great Cardinal. Another reason for its successful characterization was that Macready took infinite pains in the casting of each part; he even departed from the old custom of having an actress play the page's part, and instead gave it to a rising young actor, Mr. Howe, who subsequently became famous. (In later revivals, managers have followed this example, so that the part of Francois often starts young actors on a stage career.)

I think that all of Bulwer's characterizations in Richelieu, as in The Duchess de La Valliere, are excellent and reveal the playwright's attention to detail. The various critics differ, as might be expected, in their comments upon the characters:

The King is a small part, but in competent hands much may be made of it; but this character is often slurred over, and thus it becomes a nonentity. Baradas belongs to the unthankful range of parts; he is a villain, but not a consummate one; in fact, there is this anomaly about him, if he were much worse, he would be much better. Francois is the very antithesis of Baradas; it is only a pleasure to act the part. Joseph and Huguet, if small parts, are still important.²

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1. Other noted tragedians playing this role were: William Phelps, Charles Kean, Henry Irving, Barry Sullivan, Edwin Booth.
 2. Walter Gordon, "Richelieu," Theatre Magazine, Vol. 9, p. 75; Aug. 1, 1882.

Richelieu is no easy character to play, especially as Lord Lytton has painted him. Shrewdness and cunning, nerves of iron, an eagle's glance, courage of the lion, whims and fancies, then failing strength and baffled might, patriotism, struggle for empire, love, hatred, joy, and despair, are all thrown into the mold and passed through the fire, and from the die steps Richelieu.¹

The author of the same article says of the character, De Mauprat, "We can seldom find so much greatness of conception and so much oddity of character crammed into so few lines."² Even his literary enemy, Temple Bar, praises Bulwer's conception of Richelieu:

The character of the great Cardinal, although many may dispute Lord Lytton's view of it, is both vigorously and poetically drawn; the subordinate characters are admirably discriminated . . . perhaps, it is no exaggeration to assert that it is the best five act play written in the century.³

Thus, I have deduced that the better character development in Richelieu, as well as the greater importance of Macready's role, were contributing factors to the success of this play, and prove Bulwer-Lytton's skill in making historical figures into real people.

Bulwer-Lytton's dramatic dialogue has been the target of various types of literary criticism, both by his contemporaries and by subsequent critics. His dialogue, especially that of La Valliere, his first play, has been called didactic, stilted, and theatrical by writers of his own day. Dublin University

1. "Richelieu," Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 82, pp. 626-634, Nov. 1873.

2. Loc. cit.

3. "Lord Lytton as a Dramatist and Novelist," Temple Bar, Vol. 38, pp. 232-245, April-July, 1873.

Magazine flays Bulwer with its scathing comments, such as, ". . . so many incongruities make a most brilliant confusion," and "Bulwer gets upon his hexameters as a very short man mounts a very tall horse. Were he to describe a shower, it would be lavender water."¹ A few examples from the play, The Duchess de La Valliere, will illustrate the truth of this criticism. Lauzun, the villainous courtier, speaks of Louise's first innocent adoration for the king:

Know you not, Sire, it is the jest, among
 The pretty prattlers of the royal chamber
 That this young Dian of the woods has found
 Endymion in a king - a summer dream -
 Bright, but with vestal fancies! - scarcely love,
 But that wild interval of hopes and fears
 Through which the child glides, trembling, to the woman?²

The soldier hero, Bragelone, is made to say these didactic, unnatural words at the dramatic moment when Louise has left him forever to atone for her sinful love, in a convent.

I will lie down, and sleep away this world.
 The pause of care, the slumber of tired passion,
 Why defer till night is well-nigh spent?
 When the brief sun that gilt the landscape sets,
 When o'er the music on the leaves of life
 Chill silence falls, and every fluttering hope
 That voiced the world with song has gone to rest
 Then let thy soul, from the poor laborer, learn
 Sleep's sweetest that's taken soonest!³

Victorian maidens probably swooned with vicarious ecstasy at such lines, but they certainly were not consistent with the

1. "Bulwer's Dramatic Poetry," a review in Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 15, March, 1840, pp. 267-284.
2. The Duchess de La Valliere, I, 5.
3. Ibid., V, 2.

character of Bragelone. The frequency of such incongruous poetry makes me feel that in this play, at least, Bulwer-Lytton was writing for his reading public rather than for his theatre audience.

The dialogue is, moreover, filled with sparkling wit and smart epigrams, which again were probably aimed over the heads of unlettered theatre-goers toward his discriminate readers. "She seemed to shrink into her modest self, and a low sigh shook blushes from her beauty,"¹ and again, ". . . As if alike her virtue and his greatness made love impossible; so down the stream of purest thought, her heart glides on to danger." He speaks of King Louis as "flushed with the novelty of sway," and makes Lauzun say,

The times are changed!
'Twas by the sword and spear,
Our fathers bought ambition - vulgar butchers!
But now our wit's our spear - intrigue our armor;
The ante chamber is our field of battle;
And the best hero is - the cleverest rogue?²

In Louise's speeches upholding her ideals of honor, Bulwer-Lytton not only touched a responsive chord in the emotions of his audience; but, I think, gave these speeches a simple dignity which distinguishes these lines from his flowery poetry.

Louise's words "I am but a poor simple girl, who loves her king and honor more"³ are very effective in contrast to the extravagant love-making of the King, as well as her later pleas, "Make

1. The Duchess de La Valliere, I, 4.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Ibid., I, 5.

me dumb, deaf, blind, but keep me honest!"¹ and "the fires of Heaven seem to me like the eyes of angels, and warn me against myself!"² I agree with his critics, therefore, that the dialogue of The Duchess de La Valliere is indeed a "most brilliant confusion" from the viewpoint of consistent dramatic conversation, yet is fascinating to the reader and is teeming with quotable lines.

A modern critic would be impatient of Bulwer's habit of interrupting the plot development for soliloquies, "asides," and poetically expressed speeches; but these interruptions, for the purpose of creating a sustained dramatic effect and of featuring the "star," are all characteristic of Bulwer's period. Moreover, these "asides" appear to have been used to clarify the action of the play lest the spectator become lost in the maze of poetic speeches. In Richelieu, however, Bulwer's later play and greatest success, the dialogue is virile and realistic throughout the play, and consistently true to the characters, in fact so much so that one critic is frankly shocked that the great Cardinal is made to speak like an ordinary man.

The mechanical structure of The Duchess de La Valliere consists of a prologue and five acts, each containing many short scenes. The prologue consists of a brief explanatory note, as well as a lengthy appeal to the audience, done in

1. The Duchess de La Valliere, II, 4.

2. Loc. cit.

heroic, classical style, imploring them to be sympathetic judges of his work and to give a favorable verdict. The cumbersome length of La Valliere is probably due to the fact that a fifth act was necessary in serious drama.¹ The mechanics of stagecraft were themselves undergoing a change at this time; Nicoll has thus summarized these changes:

. . . the age produced . . . the origins of that form which . . . marked the beginnings of the modern realistic movement . . . Technically, it produced scene painters and machinists who proved to be the masters of those of later years. In regard to material arrangements, it introduced stalls, reserved seats, and a dozen other little theatrical conveniences . . . For this period is, above all others, the period of change in the theatre.²

The Duchess de La Valliere today has more appeal as a "closet drama" than as a stage presentation; this is perhaps due to the fact that

. . . its symmetry was destroyed by the alterations which increased the importance of the character which Macready assumed. The play was dragged into a four-hour performance; and the parts of Lauzun and Louis XIV were execrably played. It did not find favor with the public, and it gave opportunity for much journalistic abuse, sarcasm, and prophecy. After nine performances, which the manager wished to extend to twenty, it was withdrawn by the author.³

In publishing the play, the changes made at Macready's request were discarded, and Bulwer recorded his conviction that, performed as written, but with such deletions as would reduce to the usual length of plays, it could be restored to the stage with every prospect of success.⁴

A contemporary critic praises highly Bulwer's dramatic structure:

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1. Alfred Bates, Drama, Vol. 16; Victorian edition.
 2. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 1800-1850, Cambridge University Press, 1930.
 3. E. G. Bell, Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer.
 4. Loc. cit.

No dramatist, since the days of Shakespeare, ever better understood the essentials of stage effect than Lord Lytton; his plays are Masterpieces of dramatic structure; as the theatrical phrase goes, he always knew exactly how and when "to bring down his act drop"; he has no anti-climaxes, no superfluous lagging speeches after great situations, he kindles his audience to enthusiasm, the picture is struck, and down comes the curtain while the impression is vivid.¹

Especially was this true of Richelieu and his later plays, for Bulwer learned his lesson in the failure of his first drama.

To conclude this analysis of Bulwer's two historical plays, one naturally asks: why was one a dismal failure, and the other a lasting success? In both, there was historical accuracy and a wealth of dramatic material; each had the same "star" and a similar company. I believe, therefore, that the difference lies in the actual stagecraft, the dramatic structure; for in La Valliere, Bulwer emphasized poetic verse and noble sentiments at the expense of dramatic effect while in Richelieu the dialogue was subordinated to the dramatic situation. Then, too, there was the added experience which Bulwer had gained when he wrote Richelieu; furthermore, Macready had an important share in the success or failure of these two. Macready was ever vain of the importance of his stellar role; in The Duchess de La Valliere, his part was subordinated to that of the heroine. He was dissatisfied with his role and thus uninterested in the fate

1. "Lord Lytton as a Dramatist," in Temple Bar, Vol. 38, April-July, 1873, pp. 232-245.

of the play. In Richelieu, Macready was almost the whole play; he helped Bulwer to create scenes of highest dramatic effect and encouraged him to write a more realistic dialogue. Compare then, these contemporary criticisms of the two plays:

The Duchess de La Valliere is mediocre from beginning to end, no passage that is real poetry, and much that is absurdity. There is, besides, pervading the whole the affectation of sentiment, and overstrain of expression which characterizes an author whenever he is writing against the grain.¹

Richelieu is a magnificent play, the result of a mighty effort, and of patient gathering up of many materials not originally born in the poet's mind . . . the student of elegant phraseology, of magnificently terse and grandly simple composition, can find few better teachers. Sometimes the words are so marvellously pictorial that men, who have been accustomed all their lives to use the English language as the handmaiden of their genius, stand perplexed before the exquisite skill with which Lord Lytton constructs his sentences and the depth of meaning conveyed even by syllables. It is difficult to look at such a work, and stand before it with calm gaze, undazzled by the noon-day sheen of the poet's glittering structure.²

Bulwer-Lytton also wrote two comedies for Macready; The Lady of Lyons, in 1838, after the failure of The Duchess de La Valliere, and Money, in 1840, after the success of Richelieu. The author says that The Lady of Lyons was composed with a twofold object, to help Macready in his managerial enterprise at Covent Garden, and to see whether, after the

1. "Bulwer's Dramatic Poetry," a review in Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 15, March, 1840, pp. 267-284.

2. "Richelieu," a review in Dublin University Magazine, Vol. 82, November, 1873, pp. 626-634.

comparative dramatic failure of his first play, it was in his power to attain successfully "the art of dramatic construction and theatrical effect."¹ These two comedies were in so many respects dissimilar to his historical plays that they are proof of the author's versatility as a dramatist. Both were brilliant successes financially as well as in popular appeal; both had long, continuous "runs" as well as frequent revivals during the latter Nineteenth Century.

In the preface to The Lady of Lyons, Bulwer-Lytton gives as its source, "The Bellows Mender," a French tale, and explains his desire to write on this period of French history.

An indistinct recollection of a very pretty little tale, called "The Bellows Mender," suggested the plot of this drama. The incidents are, however, greatly altered from those in the tale and the characters entirely recast. Having long had a wish to illustrate certain periods of the French history, so, in the selection of the date in which the scenes of this play are laid, I saw that the era of the Republic was that in which the incidents were rendered most probable, in which the probationary career of the hero could well be made sufficiently rapid for dramatic effect, and in which the character of the time itself was depicted by the agencies necessary to the conduct of the narrative. For, during the early years of the French Republic, in the general ferment of society, and the brief equalization of ranks, Claude's high placed love, his ardent feelings, his unsettled principles the struggle between which makes the passion of this drama, his ambition, and his career, were phenomena that characterized the age, and in which the spirit of the nation went along with the extravagance of the individual.²

Wilstach in The Bookman makes this comment upon the source

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1. P. Wilstach, "Dramatizations of Bulwer-Lytton," The Bookman, Vol. 17, July, 1903, pp. 471-476.
 2. Loc. cit.

material:

In an old French collection called Short Stories, there is a little tale entitled "The Bellows Mender of Lyons." Not even the source when the compiler took this little fiction is given . . . He [Bulwer] created a work of art and thereby immortalized a trifle. This little tale is a fatherless waif, without anything to recommend it except that it inspired the greater author.¹

Nowhere have I been able to find anything on the source of Bulwer's other comedy, Money; hence, I think we can assume that it was an entirely original plot, containing in some instances biographical references which I shall discuss later.

In these two comedies, there was much more emphasis upon situations of plot and upon dramatic effect than in the historical plays. Bulwer has, apparently, learned how different must be the technique to appeal to a theatre audience from that needed for his reading public. Then, too, Macready's lessons in stagecraft have been well-learned; for there are shorter, more natural speeches, continuous and varied action, a well-knit plot, fewer shifting of scenes, and the characters, though important, are subordinated to the thread of the plot. The situations themselves are more farcical, more amusing, and less melodramatic. Bulwer-Lytton's signature, however, is found in his many epigrams and clever, "quotable" lines.

So many articles have been written about The Lady of Lyons both by contemporary and by later critics that I shall pick out only a few which seem to epitomize the general opinion. One

1. P. Wilstach, "Dramatizations of Bulwer-Lytton," The Bookman, Vol. 17, July, 1903, pp. 471-476.

critic gives the play a keen analysis and proves its popularity:

There is the charm of simple effects and primitive emotions, the story is worked out without violence or straining, and all through it the ordinary sympathies are struck firmly. So artfully is the whole compounded that it is possible to play Claude and Pauline in half a dozen different ways. . . . It must be admitted that there is a certain high-flown strain in particular passages, certainly bombastic, and which are almost impossible to deliver without provoking a smile . . . such as the suitor's description of the palace . . . to the ordinary player, this is inexpressibly dear, and perhaps the most precious morsel in the whole. . . . For over fifty years, it has held its ground and is always performed. Nay, it has been said that there is not a theatrical night in the year when it is not being played at some theatre of the kingdom. Every character is good and actable, and though we have seen it fifty times, as most playgoers have, there is always a reserve of novelty and attraction left which is certain to interest . . . There is one flaw in the play, however, the difficulty of the gardener's son assuming the manners and accomplishments of a nobleman without the necessary interval to acquire them.¹

The Gentleman's Magazine states that even Bulwer and Macready were surprised at this play's popularity: "Neither Macready nor Bulwer had any very brilliant hopes except that it would be a serviceable piece and would serve its turn like many others. . . yet this was to prove the most extremely popular play of modern times."²

Allardyce Nicoll thinks that Bulwer has struck a new dramatic note in this play:

Lytton's work in the dramatic sphere is a hesitating compromise between the legitimate and the illegitimate . . . The Lady of Lyons possesses something of a genuine, as

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1. Percy Fitzgerald, "The Lady of Lyons," a criticism in The Gentleman's Magazine, July-December, 1889, pp. 136-141.
 2. Loc. cit.

opposed to a spurious, dramatic note. Here, almost for the first time, do we catch the accents of the new French style of playwrighting, modern accents which well indicate the true power which Lytton possessed. The easy construction, the comparatively natural dialogue, and the general atmosphere of the play all struck a new note.¹

The extreme popularity of The Lady of Lyons started a vogue for such plays:

The Lady of Lyons, in fact, became such a byword with the theatre going public that it established a vogue for such plays: Herman Merivale wrote a comedy-vaudeville, and a burlesque on Bulwer's play in The Lady of Lyons Married and Settled, another parody was entitled In the Lyons Den; six years later, W. T. Moncrieff wrote a similar drama, The Beauty of Lyons, while part of the same plot is introduced into Browning's Pippa Passes, five years later. The Lady of Lyons saw regular revivals up to the end of the century, and a series of later burlesques.²

Still others were H. J. Byron's, The Lady of Lyons or Twopenny Pride and Pennytence (1858), and R. Reece's The Lady of Lyons Married and Claude Unsettled (1884). All this goes to prove the play's continued popularity.

The characterizations in The Lady of Lyons are definite types, for the most part of a farcical nature who contribute to the plot development rather than reveal any character delineation. The one exception is the character of Pauline, created by Helen Faucit and later played by the great actresses of the century including Ellen Terry, Mary Anderson, and Lily Langtry. In both these comedies, the stellar role is not as important as in the historical plays, for the

1. Nicoll, Allardyce, "Tragedies and Dramas," from A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama (1800-1850), Cambridge University Press, 1930.

2. Loc. cit.

characterization is subordinated to the plot development. Even the ending of The Lady of Lyons is incongruous and inconsistent with the character of Pauline, but it was one very popular with audiences. Punch magazine satirized the probable domestic difficulties of this mesalliance of Pauline and Claude in its absurd sequel, In the Lyons Den.¹

In his other comedy Money (1840), the characterizations are farcical, and brilliantly clever. No attempt is made at any character study; the people are merely types woven deftly into the plot pattern and are made the mouthpieces of scintillating wit and biting sarcasm. The plot of Money seems to have been built upon the old truism,

'Tis a very good world we live in,
To lend or to spend, or to give in;
But to beg, or to borrow, or get a man's own,
'Tis the very worst world that ever was known.²

Throughout the entire play, there is a satire on social shams and on mercenary affections. At the beginning of the play, Sir John says,

There are two rules in life. First, men are valued not for what they are, but what they seem to be. Secondly, if you have no merit or money of your own, you must trade on the merits and money of other people.³

Alfred Bates, in his book on the drama, comments thus on Money:

1. Alfred Bates, The Drama, Its History, Literature, and Influence on Civilization (Victorian edition), Vol. 16, Cambridge, 1903.

2. Money, I, 1.

3. Loc. cit.

In Bulwer's Money there is depicted English society as it was in 1840, with due allowance for the element of exaggeration and caricature. With all its faults, it remains a favorite example of its class, and has been represented by the foremost actors of England and America . . . Bulwer's freshness of thought and gift of portraiture gave him a just title to popularity, and his nobility of sentiment made his influence as wholesome as it was widespread.¹

This play is more autobiographical than any other of Bulwer's dramas: he, too, like his hero, Alfred Evelyn, was nobly born, "delicately nurtured," yet at this time was forced to write copiously to support an extravagant household, an estranged wife and two children.² Evelyn says to his beloved what Bulwer must have often said to his wife Rosina, "For you I have endured the weary bondage of this house . . . the bread purchased by toils that should have led me to loftier ends."³

From many angles, however, Money seems to me the best written drama of all Bulwer's plays: first, the plot is a fast-moving, amusing farce; second, the characters, though typed, are consistently drawn and are revealing pictures of contemporary people; third, the situations are "natural" for this "comedy of manners"; fourth, the dialogue is unusually clever and witty, the speeches are shorter and less flowery, while some of the love passages are truly

1. Alfred Bates, The Drama, Its History, Literature, and Influence on Civilization (Victorian edition), Vol. 16, Cambridge, 1903.

2. See above, Chapter II, p. 26.

3. Money, III, 3. The constant demands of Bulwer's wife kept him chained to writing prolifically for popular consumption when he was desiring to write for literary acclaim.

beautiful. "The eyes that charmed away every sorrow, the hand whose lightest touch thrilled to the very core, the presence that, like moonlight, shed its own hallowing beauty over the meanest things."¹

Bulwer often makes a play upon words in Money, as is illustrated in the line, "And the more a man's worth, John, the worthier man he must be."²

In the end of the comedy love triumphs over money to give the popular ending in which the poor cousin wins, and the mercenary villain is foiled. Bulwer almost seems to be speaking of his own ultimate triumph over pecuniary difficulties, when his hero says in the last scene, "Could you but see my heart at this moment, with what love, what veneration, what anguish it is filled, you would know how little, in the great calamities of life, fortune is really worth."³

Bulwer has improved considerably in effective use of mechanical stagecraft in Money; there is none of the spectacular pageantry of his earlier tragedies nor even the scenic contrast found in The Lady of Lyons between the novel of Claude's mother and the palace of the Deschappelles. Both of these comedies of Bulwer's were successful financially, popular in their own time and for many years afterward; favorably received by most critics, they became so much the

1. Money, V, 1.

2. Ibid., V, 5.

3. Loc. cit.

"dramatic fashion" that they were imitated by other playwrights.

I think that the reasons for the success of Bulwer's two comedies and his heroic drama, Richelieu, are as follows: The latter's merit depended chiefly on its characterization of the Cardinal, its melodramatic situations and stirring speeches. The Lady of Lyons although having a heroine for its stellar role, as did The Duchess de La Valliere, yet had an equally important part for Macready; the characterizations were well-developed, the situations were more farcical than dramatic, and the dialogue so incongruously absurd at times as to be unusually entertaining. Yet, in both these plays, the star could make or break the play. Money's chief assets, however, were its clever, witty dialogue, its satirical situations, and its portrayal of contemporary society.

With the production of these three successes, under the dramatic guidance of Macready, Bulwer-Lytton attained his peak as a dramatist. Even the critics generally agree that one of the greatest reasons for Bulwer's popularity was that, except in a few rare intervals of unusual talent, he was nothing more than the high expression of his own age. One, therefore, can get a picture of the age from Bulwer's works, since "no man ever wrote more directly out of his own heart."¹

1. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, preface to The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

The fact that his plays have held the stage longer than other Nineteenth Century dramas indicates their universality of interest. His three famous plays, Money, The Lady of Lyons, and Richelieu, were classic dramas in any celebrated repertory long after the author's death; they have served as stellar vehicles to display the talents of a galaxy of theatrical stars; and even today Richelieu is played on stage and radio by Walter Hampden, the Twentieth Century successor of William Macready. Moreover, the critics' continuous attacks upon Bulwer's works from 1837 to 1841, and again from 1851 to the end of his life, indicate that his detractors recognized his literary merit to be sufficiently worthy of their attention.

His subsequent plays, which I shall discuss in the following chapter, are little known and are better read than acted. For, upon Macready's retirement from the stage, we find a gap of many years in Bulwer's dramatic writing, from 1840 to 1851. Although The Sea Captain was originally produced in 1839 at Haymarket Theatre, under Macready's management, and enjoyed a brilliant run during that season, yet this play was withdrawn by the author from publication until 1868, when he rewrote it as The Rightful Heir; hence, it will be included with Bulwer's later dramas.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYS WRITTEN BY BULWER-LYTTON
AFTER MACREADY'S RETIREMENT

CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYS WRITTEN BY BULWER-LYTTON AFTER MACREADY'S RETIREMENT

The Rightful Heir and Not So Bad As We Seem, plays written after The Duchess de La Valliere, dealing with the love and honor theme, apparently have not survived Bulwer's own period, since the original Knebworth edition is the only collection including these two. Bulwer-Lytton originally wrote The Rightful Heir in 1839 as The Sea Captain, suggested by Dumas' novel, Le Capitaine Paul. This drama was written for Macready's management of Haymarket Theatre, and although it was played frequently during his engagement there, both Bulwer and Macready were dissatisfied with it. Macready makes scant comment on it in his diary; yet on the opening night, October 31, 1839, he says, "Acted Norman in Bulwer's new play, with some energy and occasional inspiration. Was received very warmly, and called for at the end, was greeted with much enthusiasm."¹ Yet Bulwer-Lytton was not satisfied and made so many revisions, that a new play was the result.

The author withdrew The Sea Captain from the stage [and even from printed publication] while it had not lost such degree of favor as the admirable acting of Mr. Macready chiefly contributed to obtain for it, intending to replace it before the public with some important changes in the histrionic cast, and certain slight alterations in the conduct of the story. But the alterations, once commenced, became so extensive in character, diction, and even in

1. William Macready, Reminiscences, Diaries, and Letters, edited by F. Pollack, 1875.

revision of plot, that a new play gradually rose from the foundation of the old one. The task thus undertaken, being delayed by other demands upon time and thought, was scarcely completed when Mr. Macready's retirement from his profession suspended the author's literary connection with the stage, and The Rightful Heir has remained in tranquil seclusion till this year [1868] when he submits his appeal to the proper tribunal; . . . sure, that if he fail of a favorable hearing, it will not be the fault of the friends who take part in his cause and act in his behalf.¹

The revised play, now called The Rightful Heir, was first performed on the third of October, 1868, at the Lyceum Theatre by a mediocre cast. I could find no comments on its public reception; yet the fact that it was produced in America at the same time indicated that some theatrical managers did believe in its popular appeal. D. Waddell comments upon the fact that it was also played in America:

The American copyright of the play, The Rightful Heir, which was put on first at the Lyceum Theatre, London, October 3, 1868, was given to me, and the play was produced on the same date in this country. It was read by five gentlemen in the opera house of Wilmington, North Carolina, and that is the only public representation in America. I was taken to the first performance in London, and I still recall my almost painful rapture.²

Bulwer's other play written at this time on the love-and-honor theme, Not So Bad As We Seem, was first performed on the sixteenth of May, 1851, before the Queen and Prince Consort at Devonshire House, Piccadilly. This drama was dedicated to the Duke of Devonshire, and was written to provide funds for the

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1. The Dramatic Works of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Knebworth edition, prefatory note to The Rightful Heir, September 28, 1868.
 2. G. D. Waddell, "Reminiscences and Letters of Bulwer-Lytton," Century, Vol. 88, July 1914, pp. 469-472.

establishment of the Guild of Literature and Art.¹ Temple Bar, a contemporary periodical, said of this play, ". . . in spite of its remarkable merit, it may be said to have expired with its purpose, as it never obtained a footing upon the regular stage."²

The predominance of the love and honor theme in these two plays may be attributed to the widespread public interest in plots of this sort. The popularity of such plays as Virginus by J. S. Knowles, The Blot on the 'Scutcheon by Robert Browning, and The Octoreon by Dion Boucicault revealed popular enthusiasm for the love and honor theme. These two plays of Bulwer's are similar to the aforementioned dramas in their melodramatic plot development, typed characterization, grandiloquent speeches, use of elaborate scenery and pageantry effects, as well as the frequency of "quotable" lines.

These two plays, however, have a significance to me from the viewpoint of Bulwer's dramatic career; for I find in them numerous biographical references. It seems that, in his earlier desire for money and for dramatic recognition, and while under the protection of Macready, Bulwer wrote according to public demand; now with his financial security and literary fame established, he dared to write out of his own emotions and

1. Bulwer-Lytton, Knebworth edition of his plays, dedicatory letter to the Duke of Devonshire, p. 180.

2. "Lord Lytton as a Dramatist and Novelist," by "The Author of Mirabeau" (Anonymous) in Temple Bar, Vol. 38, April-July 1873, pp. 232-245.

experiences. In the opening lines of The Rightful Heir, "Fie, what a helpless thing is the hand of well-born poverty!" Bulwer seems to be pitying himself when he, a pampered nobleman, had had to write for his livelihood. Again, Vyvyan's speech, ". . . I love to mark the quiver of a strong man's bearded lip when his voice lingers on the name of mother,"¹ would seem to portray Bulwer's own deep affection for his mother. Though Bulwer was his mother's favorite, the family's rich estates were inherited by his elder brother, and because of that, Bulwer was dependent upon his mother's bounty. Indeed, the author himself might have been saying, "If the elder prove his rights, dear lady, your younger son will know what's poverty!"² Bulwer-Lytton's love for Rosina and his quarrel with his mother over his love can be seen in these lines, "Lady, I once was young, and pined for gold, to wed the maid I loved"³; and his enforced separation from Rosina can be pictured in his words, "O, for some fairy talisman to conjure up to these longing eyes the form they pine for! And yet in love, there's no such word as absence; the loved one glides beside our steps forever."⁴ Bulwer's final reconciliation with his mother seems portrayed in these lines, "part we, then, thus? No, put thine arms around me; Let me remember in

1. The Rightful Heir, I, 1.

2. Ibid., I, 2.

3. Loc. cit.

4. Loc. cit.

the years to come, That I have lived to say, a mother blessed me!"¹

In Not So Bad as We Seem, there are some apparently biographical allusions. The line, "I have found what I have sought all my life, the union of womanly feeling and childlike innocence,"² is almost a duplicate of a sentence in one of Bulwer's earlier love letters to Rosina. He makes a direct allusion to the Queen and to the cause for which this play was written, in the following, "When your Order shall rise with the civilization it called into being, and shall refer its claim to . . . some Queen whom even Milton might have sung, and even a Hampden have died for."³

In each of these two dramas, Love and Honor may be named the leading characters; and in each, Honor triumphs, a victory consistent with Victorian morals of that time. Out of the many characteristic and quotable lines upon this concept, there are two which typify the motif of these two dramas, "A woman has appealed for her name to mine honor as a man,"⁴ and "My sole bride, Honor, and my sole altar -- England!"⁵

Bulwer's last two plays, Darnley and Walpole, which I have classified as plays of political thought, are so obscure that I have found no criticism of them; in fact, most of

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1. The Rightful Heir, IV, 2.
 2. Not So Bad as We Seem, II, 1.
 3. Ibid., IV, 2.
 4. Ibid., V, 1.
 5. The Rightful Heir, IV, 1.

Bulwer-Lytton's commentators do not even consider them in discussing his dramatic works. These plays, however, do make such interesting reading that I think the author intended them to be read rather than acted.

Walpole was written sometime between 1866 and 1870,¹ when Bulwer's health was poor; he had just been raised to the peerage, and the rash political views of his youth had somewhat mellowed. Walpole is a drama in which love and honor become tangled with political ambition; the sub-title Every Man Has His Price, is indicative of its political satire. There is also a definite biographical association between the political thoughts expressed in Walpole and the author's own political views. His son comments in his biography upon the relation of Bulwer's political and literary beliefs:

He abhorred the politics of destruction and disintegration. The most trifling relics of his childhood were tenaciously preserved by him, with a strong sentiment of conservation . . . He had a profound respect for continuity; and having great aspirations, but no envy, there was in him nothing of the revolutionist. But he was an ardent reformer wherever he recognized a rational promise of practical improvement.²

Some lines of caustic satire which indicate the general tenor of the play are: "My honor's at stake, to mend every motion that ministers make."³ "Public virtue when construed means private ambition,"⁴ and at the end of the play, "Robert

1. G. D. Waddell, "Reminiscences and Letters of Bulwer-Lytton," Century, Vol. 88, July, 1914.

2. Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

3. Walpole, I, 4.

4. Ibid., II, 5.

Walpole, at last you have bought me, I fear; every man has his price. My majority's clear."¹

Walpole is not only shorter than Bulwer's other dramas, but it is the only one written in rhyme. (Although a few of his others were written in poetic prose, in a sort of blank verse.) According to my judgment, Bulwer-Lytton's mastery of literary diction and the flexibility of his verse are superbly revealed in this play; for it must take considerable skill so to blend rhyme, dialogue, and plot development. One thus readily sees, how Walpole can be delightful reading, but poor drama. The Graphic magazine praised this play, but the Athenaeum condemned it. But Bulwer, at that time, had become reconciled to the antagonism of the critics; he said, "I find that Walpole is not generally appreciated . . . the rhyme condemned, the thing thought unworthy of me. . . . But I have too many unmerited blessings to allow myself to grumble over-much."²

The play Darnley, unfinished at the time of Bulwer's death, was left to his son, along with his other unpublished manuscripts. His son says,³ that he cannot fix precisely the date at which it was written but because of the allusions to an attempt on the life of Louis Phillipe and the military action of Sir Harry Pottinger, it must have lain for many years

1. Walpole, III, 6.

2. G. D. Waddell, "Reminiscences and Letters of Bulwer-Lytton," Century, Vol. 88, July, 1914.

3. Robert Lytton, preface to Darnley in the Knebworth edition of Bulwer's drama, 1882.

in the author's portfolio. Moreover, Bulwer's son had such faith in the manuscript that he engaged an eminent dramatist, Coghlan, to complete it. He comments upon his eagerness to have the play completed:

Notwithstanding the unfinished condition of it, the manuscript of Darnley appeared to me too vigorous and valuable a specimen of its author's dramatic workmanship to be permanently withheld from the public. In this impression I was confirmed by the unqualified opinion of the late Mr. John Forster and the late Mr. George Henry Lewes to whom I showed it. Those competent judges of dramatic writing also shared my conviction that for the publication of this work the stage was the only adequate vehicle.¹

Yet because Mr. Coghlan was not professionally connected with the stage, his last act was not "good theatre"; and young Lytton attributes the failure of the play to the fact that "the fifth act by Mr. Coghlan was not only ineffective itself; it was also destructive to the effect of the four preceding ones."² Consequently, young Bulwer-Lytton, in the published version, merely outlines the last act according to the denouement intended by the author.

There is nothing in dialogue, characterization, or plot development in this drama to differentiate it from any of the others. To me, its significance, as in other of his later plays, lies in the biographical references. Even his son comments³ on the biographical meaning of the following passage

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1. Robert Lytton, preface to Darnley in the Knebworth edition of Bulwer's drama, 1882.
 2. Loc. cit.
 3. Robert Bulwer, Earl of Lytton, Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

referring to his father's domestic situation; where the husband, Darnley, says to the wife:

Indulgence! What, was the word misapplied? I might have expected to find even in so fair a partner a companion, a friend, a home. Can you deny that I have found them not? But when did I repine while you were happy? Wearied, exhausted, in all my cares, in all my anxieties, it soothed me to think that these, my uncongenial habits, were adding to the joy of your youth.¹

Again there is this bitterly significant passage written at the time when Bulwer's vengeful wife had been reviling him in anonymous letters and had published scandalous books of denunciation,

I would rather stand by her grave than look upon her face. Fortunately the state bequeathed me obliged me to change the name she stains and bears. And to you alone [he refers to his son here] I have confided the history of her shame.²

In this analysis of Bulwer-Lytton's dramas on the love and honor theme, I find that there are some concepts common to all his plays: his melodramatic plot development, the use of poetic and flowery dialogue, spectacular stage effects, the predominance of a single characterization typical of the "star system," the didacticism of the speeches, and the apparent "moral lesson" in each play. F. Gribble comments upon Bulwer's treatment of the love and honor theme:

He preached a doctrine that youth eternally desires to hear - the belief that the first disappointed love will be the last. . . . He had his characters find outlets for

1. Darnley, IV, 1.

2. Ibid., I, 2.

their disappointed love in politics, tours upon the Continent, sadly making love to Court beauties, or being involved in intrigues. For the things in which the Man of Mystery fails to find pleasure must be the very things which those who read about him are likely to sigh for as unattainable delights; his "Dead Sea Apples" must be apples that other people regard as luscious, tempting fruit. Lord Lytton, with a true instinct, divined that fact. . . . There is a good deal in his writings that would warrant one in styling him "The Last of the Byrons." And this is Byronism of a sort that everybody can understand.¹

Yet, many of Bulwer's contemporary critics have stated that his characters were the personification of a certain quality rather than of a certain individual. Bulwer's answer to this is told in his son's biography:

The author states that his design was not to detail a mere series of events in the history of one individual or another, but to personify certain dispositions influential upon conduct. . . . He started with his "abstract qualities" and then considered how he could people his work with the concrete "incarnations" of these abstractions. Metaphysics was the author's chief object and human nature was sacrificed to it.²

But in spite of, or because of, this method of characterization, The Lady of Lyons and Money were unusually popular and were often revived. The editor of Temple Bar has explained this popularity thus:

No play ever written has drawn more money to theatrical treasuries than The Lady of Lyons; and yet the plot is improbable, many of the incidents are all but impossible . . . but the powerful interest of the story, which strikes upon sympathetic chords in every human heart, the variety, strength, and rapidity of the situations, carry away the judgment of the spectator; and he, who, in his closet,

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1. F. Gribble, "The Art of Bulwer-Lytton," The Fortnightly Review, May, 1903, pp. 838-847.
 2. Robert Bulwer, Earl of Lytton, Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Bulwer-Lytton.

would sharply criticize the work and smile at the absurdities, could, in the theatre, no more resist its spell than a love sick girl in her teens.¹

Gribble makes this comment upon the literary art of Bulwer-Lytton:

. . . a second secret of his success may be sought in his adroit use of melodramatic effect . . . Whatever rang false in his work, the cynicism at least rang true, being the cynicism of one who was really a man of the world . . . The impression given by the contemplation of his work as a whole is that he labored hard and long to get into touch with real life, only to make it unreal by the act of touching it.²

Furthermore, in my judgment, Bulwer-Lytton's plays are exceptional even in the field of poetic drama, since there are many quotable lines famous out of their context, a fact which was not true of the other Nineteenth Century drama. For, I think the following passages from *Richelieu* are as truly worth remembering as some lines from Shakespeare:

Beneath the rule of men entirely great
The pen is mightier than the sword.³

There's a great Spirit ever in the air
That from prolific and far-spreading wings
Scatters the seeds of honor - yea, the walls
And moats of castled forts - the barren seas -
The cell wherein the pale-eyed student holds
Talk with melodious science - all are sown
With everlasting honors, if our souls
Will toil for fame as boors for bread.⁴

and,

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1. "Lord Lytton as a Dramatist and Novelist," Temple Bar, Vol. 38, April - July, 1873.
 2. F. Gribble, "The Art of Bulwer-Lytton," The Fortnightly Review, May, 1903, pp. 838-847.
 3. Richelieu, II, 2.
 4. Ibid., IV, 1.

Our glories float between the earth and heaven
Like clouds which seem pavilions of the sun,
And are the playthings of the casual wind;
Still, like the cloud which drops on unseen crags,
The dews the wild flower feeds on, our ambition -
May from its airy height drop gladness down
On unsuspected virtue; and the flower
May bless the cloud when it hath passed away!¹

Since Bulwer held the most prominent place in the drama of a period which has been generally neglected, one can, through his plays, discover the faults that have caused this dramatic period to be generally overlooked. As a novelist, Bulwer was but one among many of his time, whereas, as a dramatist, he stands alone, a playwright who not only appealed to the public of his own day, but has also interested drama lovers of subsequent generations.

1. Richelieu, V, 3.

CONCLUSION

**BULWER-LYTTON'S PLACE IN THE ENGLISH DRAMA
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BULWER-LYTTON'S PLACE IN THE ENGLISH DRAMA OF THE MIDDLE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Although there is little known or written of the English drama from 1800 to 1850, yet all that this half century really achieved was the establishment of melodrama as a formal type, the elaboration of some special themes hitherto untouched, and the more definite introduction of a lyric quality into the drama. For this time was unfavorable to the development of the drama; the great novelists did not write for the stage, because, while playwrights were given small salaries by the impoverished managers, a successful novelist could build up a fortune. This Victorian period in the drama may be thus contrasted with the Elizabethan period: in the latter age, great literary men wrote for the stage, whereas, in the former, it was the novelists who were outstanding; the Victorians, unlike the Elizabethans, were more interested in the reading drama than in actual presentation; Elizabethan playwrights did not suffer from the strict censorship of the early 1900's, and their audiences, unlike Victorians, were more interested in their plays than in the stars who enacted them; Elizabethan stage managers were not hampered by conditions of theatre monopoly nor were they beggared by elaborate scenery; and Victorian theatregoers were eager to condemn a new play, Elizabethans to encourage it. Thus, while one age was a

period of great plays, the other produced very few worthy of any literary recognition.

The monopoly system, which gave only Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres the right to present serious drama, further curtailed the development of mid-Nineteenth Century playwriting; for the restrictions imposed upon dramatists by these monopoly conditions forced them to write lengthy plays, suitable for those two theatres. The result was usually a mediocre, stereotyped drama. Furthermore, the literary mediocrity of popular mid-Victorian plays may be attributed to the comparative simplicity of the average theatre-goer, accounting for the popularity of the melodrama, to patriotic enthusiasm, producing plays of naval victories, like Black-Eyed Susan, to the popularity of domestic dramas, all a part of that movement toward realism, which, from melodramatic and trivial farce, ultimately built the foundation for the deeper and more profound domestic drama of today, and to the moral sentiment of the time, a more negative than positive influence, succeeding mainly in killing free expression.

Into such a situation William Macready launched Bulwer-Lytton as a dramatist; for Macready, an admirer of Shakespeare, deploring the fact that "he could find no play worthy of his talents," begged Bulwer to help him "elevate the stage." At this time Bulwer-Lytton was such a popular and successful novelist that he had already incurred the envy of the critics

and the jealousy of other writers; he knew the rabid mob of merciless theatre-goers and how a play could figuratively be torn to pieces, hence, his hesitant fears about dramatic writing. On the other hand, he was loyal to his friend, Macready; always a crusader, he yearned to improve conditions in the theatre; and his egotism and his desire for versatility made him eager to find other mediums of literary expression. His first play, The Duchess de La Valliere, was too "high-brow" for the audiences and it failed, but, in spite of his bitter discouragement, Bulwer wrote again. His next plays, The Lady of Lyons, and Richelieu, were popular and financial successes; Money, a comedy of contemporary society, was equally successful. In The Sea Captain, which Bulwer withdrew after three weeks and later rewrote as The Rightful Heir, the author was writing more for his literary than for his theatre-going public. Not So Bad As We Seem, written on impulse for the establishment of a benevolent institution and performed by interested amateurs, rapidly poured £ 3000 into the coffers of the newly created Guild and was first played before Queen Victoria and her Prince Consort. This play, therefore, can be considered among his successes, since it most certainly accomplished the purpose for which it was written. Walpole, written many years later, and Darnley, unfinished at Bulwer's death, were written for only semi-professional groups and at the insistence of friends. These

plays, therefore, should not be considered as dramatic failures, but rather as little publicized, and hence, comparatively unknown works.

Even though Bulwer collaborated with Macready in an effort to elevate the drama, his plays have all the faults of the period; hence, why and how have some of his plays survived while those of his contemporary dramatists have died with their own generation? I believe that this question is thus answered: first, Bulwer-Lytton's plays, even those which were not "stageworthy" and which have survived only as reading drama, all have literary merit and afford interesting reading; second, his character delineations in his three successful plays have challenged performers of merit, who have repeatedly used his dramas as their stellar vehicles; third, the sheer beauty and resonance of his lines in Richelieu have consistently interested declamatory actors; fourth, his stagecraft with its frequent use of spectacular pageantry has intrigued producers; and fifth, the universality of his plots has aroused interest. Other plays, which were great successes in Bulwer's day, have superficial plots, artificial speeches, and situations as "dated" as their costumes; in Bulwer's plays, however, while the speech and the circumstances are of another day, his themes are timeless, a girl's struggle against a dishonoring love, (The Duchess de La Valliere) an ambitious lover overcoming foolish pride,

(The Lady of Lyons) the desire for money as the root of all evil, (Money) and the ingenious schemes of an egotistical patriot. (Richelieu) Even in his lesser known plays, there are themes of universal appeal; the drama of a "disgraced woman" in Not So Bad As We Seem, a mother's fight for her son in The Rightful Heir, the schemes of an ambitious politician in Walpole, and the busy-husband-and-neglected-wife conflict in his unfinished domestic drama, Darnley. He was sufficiently farsighted to avoid problems pertinent only to his own day, and, instead, dwelt upon concepts of lasting appeal. Thus, his plots of love and honor, of maternal affection, of patriotism, of class pride, of political ambition are as real today as they were in the 1840's.

Another reason for the survival of Bulwer's dramas may be the fact that he was primarily interested in the stage as a literary medium, and that, even though he was forced to pander to public taste in his dialogue and in some of his plot development, he did not degrade his literary dignity by appealing solely to the commercialism of the managers and to the crude taste of the pit, but dared to hold to his own literary standards. Moreover, egotistically hoping that his plays would outlive his own generation, Bulwer did not use the colloquial idioms of the vernacular as freely as did other playwrights; in many instances, even, the sheer literary beauty of some of his lines has appealed to the "intelligentsia"

of subsequent generations as well as to those of his own. For, Bulwer and Macready held faithfully to their purpose of elevating the stage. Thus, Bulwer, while writing successes for popular appeal, at the same time greatly influenced dramatic tastes and standards; furthermore, the comments of various literary journals indicated that Bulwer-Lytton had turned the attention of the more scholarly class toward the hitherto ignored drama.

Just as there must be a bridge to span two distant shores, a bridge which is soon forgotten by the traveller who is intent upon the other bank, so must there have been transition dramatists in the development of the theatre, dramatists whose usefulness is likewise forgotten by those who have reached the later period. That explains the comparative obscurity of Bulwer-Lytton; he was neither so famous as those sophisticates who preceded him nor yet so great as those realists who followed him. Dramatic students speak glibly of Sheridan and Goldsmith, of Robertson and Ibsen, yet they know or care little of the playwrights who intervened. Yet, but for Bulwer-Lytton, (the other dramatists of his time, because of their mediocrity, gave no lasting contribution to English drama) who combined smart comedy with realistic problem, the development of English drama most surely would have been different. His first plays, The Duchess de La Valliere and The Lady of Lyons, look

backward to those who preceded him; later, in Richelieu, grave realism is used with historical subject matter; then after finding that to be successful, Bulwer-Lytton dared to write a smart comedy, Money, which was also a problem play. His last play, Darnley, a domestic drama, shows a great similarity to those of Robertson and Wilde, who were to come after him.

Bulwer-Lytton's dramas are historically valuable in that, through them, one may get a picture of the theatre of a hundred years ago. The vast array of characters and spectacular stage effects indicate the "apron" stage; the "asides," monologues, and soliloquies found in the stellar role reveal the public's eagerness to admire their star; the five acts, with their several scenes, show the accustomed length of plays, which still followed the Shakesperean tradition; the many indications of the ending which are found in the first acts of the plays tell how Nineteenth Century audiences wanted no "surprise ending"; furthermore, the melodramatic treatment of even the most natural situations show that these play-goers desired a colorful "escape" from the drab smugness of the Victorian era; while the bright overhead lighting which necessitated spectacular pageantry reveals that the subtle stage effects of illumination by electricity had not yet been invented.

Lastly, Bulwer-Lytton's plays have contributed to the

dramatic heritage by their many "quotable" lines; whereas in no other play of this period have I found any line even vaguely familiar. I attribute this to the fact that Bulwer unconsciously lapsed into the poetic at all times; for, even in his plays which are not deliberately poetic, lyric beauty and imaginative fancy are to be found. Thus, his lines have been frequently used outside their own context and long after his own generation, to such an extent that even the origin of his "The pen is mightier than the sword" has been generally forgotten. One can scarcely think of a subject of general interest where a quotation from Bulwer-Lytton would not be pertinent; for he has taken the most trite statements and invested them with a sort of poetic unworldliness that I find to be lyrically beautiful.

Then, what was Bulwer-Lytton's place in the English drama of the middle Nineteenth Century? He was representative of that period from a historical standpoint, he has contributed to the development of the English drama, and many of his plays still possess an interest for the discriminating dramatic student. Because of his own reticent discretion and because of the malicious spite of his estranged wife, so little has been known of him that he has been suspended in a dim and ambiguous position in the history of our literature. He is never quoted as one of our great writers, and, yet, he holds a place of his own from which it

is improbable that he will ever be dislodged; for Edward Bulwer-Lytton alone emerged from the drama of the "gas light" era to represent the transition from the candle-lit stage of Sheridan to the electrically lighted brilliance of Twentieth Century realism.

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